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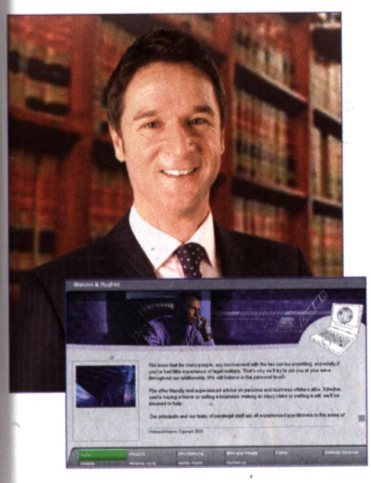
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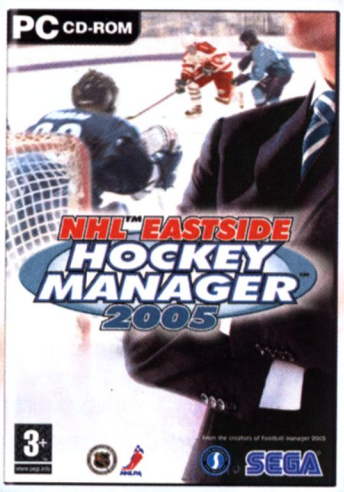
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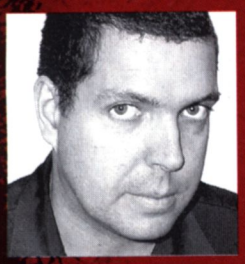
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PCZONE ISSUE 157

THE FIRST AND BEST FOR PC GAMES

BATTLEFIELD 2

Exclusive review of the greatest online FPS ever! P70



PC Original

As we storm into part two of our round-up of PC titles from the E3 2005 expo, it's heartening to see that the overall quality and sophistication of the games on show appears to be improving year-on-year. Either that, or my eyesight is getting worse.

Examples include the shooter *F.E.A.R.* moving towards darker, more mature storytelling, RPG *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* possibly redefining what can be achieved with virtual living worlds, and god sim/strategy epic *Black & White 2* advancing the sophistication of creature AI. And let's not forget Remedy's *Alan Wake*, because it uses the name Alan in a videogame title.

Our cover game *Battlefield 2* is also a case in point – the third iteration of EA's multiplayer shooter is the best ever, vastly improving the visuals and tactical side of things, while allowing you to unleash all-new weaponry and watch those ragdoll bodies fly. With the Interweb buzzing with hype and inflated expectations for the next-gen consoles, it's fantastic that the PC continues to push forward amazing, original games possessing online multiplayer modes, and other features far exceeding anything that's going to be available on other hardware in the next 12 months and beyond.

Finally, to wave goodbye to E3 2005, we have a bumper collection of new movies on the discs, a host of exclusive previews (don't miss the new shots of *F.E.A.R.* – page 42) plus a special post-mortem on the good, the bad and the ugly incidents from *PC ZONE*'s week in LA from Steve 'NeverQuest' Hill (page 32). Oh, and make sure you pick up a copy of next month's *PC ZONE*, as we have some *very* exciting news...

Jamie Sefton
Acting Editor



COVER DISCS P136

■ **DEMOS AND MOVIES!**
An entire disc featuring the select cuts of the hottest movies from E3, from *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* to *Alan Wake*. Plus, be a space hero in *Phantasy Star Online Blue Burst*.

■ **DVD EXCLUSIVES**
A massive 63 movies from the year's hottest show (including *Dark Sector*, *Hellgate: London*, *Prince Of Persia 3*, *F.E.A.R.* and more) and the chance to drive yourself round the bend with *SCAR*.



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Hardware Photography in-house
Origination ColourFlow 020 7323 0022
Printed in the UK by Southern Print
Distribution Marketforce (UK)

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Distributed by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 5th Floor, Low Rise Building, Kings Reach Tower, Stamford Street, London, SE1 9LS. Tel 0207 633 3333

Printed in the UK by Wyndeham Heron Ltd, The Bentall Complex, Colchester Road, Heybridge, Malden, Essex, CM9 7NW

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Over 100 international editions of our magazines are also published in 30 other countries across the world.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)

Managing Director UK Robert Price
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NEXT ISSUE: PCZ #158
On sale July 21. That's a Thursday.

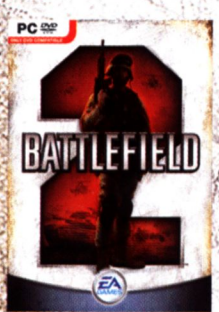
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WIN!

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GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Phew!





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■ **BACK IN BLACK** Paul Presley

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"Beautifully rendered, Kong towers over everything"

THE *King Kong* presentation at E3 was, aptly, one of the biggest events at Ubisoft's stand. Peter Jackson is a huge fan of *BG&E*, and cites that as the reason for choosing Ubisoft Montreal (and creative director, Michel Ancel in particular) to collaborate on the game.

Familiar filmic themes abound from the start, with a semi-naked damsel tied to a stake, and tribal natives dancing around chanting "Kong! Kong!"

And what a great ape! Beautifully rendered, towering over everything before him. Unfortunately, Ubisoft is unwilling to release any monkey images to the public prior to the film studio's unveiling of this new Kong, but take our word for it that both game and ape look amazing. Going beyond the film's narrative has provided Ancel with the scope to carve a truly inspired action ride, and switching perspectives at key plot points from man to ape and back again is a novel way to capture the sympathetic side of the great beast, even if those moments appear to be extended punch-ups with dinosaurs.



An old-style movie camera isn't the best thing to take into a jungle...

MONKEY PUNCHER

The brutal nature of these fights – headbutts, *POP*-style agility, even grabbing a T-Rex's jaw and ripping it off at one point – combined with the emotionally charged visual style of Kong (wonky mouth, jutting teeth, slightly 'thick' look – at least when he's not roaring and ripping dinosaur limbs apart) instantly elevates the titular monkey far above the usual bland one-dimensional gaming monsters. This is an ape you'll feel for. Even when you're fleeing for your life.

Speaking of which, while you're in the Adrian Brody role, the experience is one of merely trying to work out how to remain uneaten. It's very survival-based – running through the mist-drenched jungle, chased by either enraged natives, irate giant monkeys, ravenous dinosaurs or bizarrely-sized jungle creatures.

Luckily, you're not alone. The film's stars are here in force, specifically Jack Black, helping you and each other out with some impressive survival AI. The jungle provides plenty of inspiration for weapons, too – spears can be made on the fly – as well as making for some exciting set pieces. A precarious rope bridge level has all the tension you'd expect from knowing that giant beasties are all around and death is just a slippery step away...

The E3 demo made no mention of the city-side of the game, but with Kong scaling the Empire State Building being one of the most iconic images in film history, we're expecting a fair amount of *Rampage*-style action to be taking place once you're free of the jungle environs.

For now we're plenty satisfied with these gloomy, rain-soaked jungle screens. If they're good enough for Jackson... PCZ



What fresh hell is this?



Centipede dentists are notoriously unreliable.



Not many people realise that if there's one thing a T-Rex hates, it's scaffolding...

QUICK... GET TO IKEA
The scenery is mostly interactive, and combined with the storytelling skills of Peter Jackson and the inventive gameplay designs of Michel Ancel, you end up with some superbly dramatic touches – from collapsing gangways to dinosaurs eating hapless, bridge-trapped victims above your head.

WHAT BIG TEETH YOU'VE GOT
Some of the dinosaurs were based on designs made for the film, but eventually dropped by Jackson and co for dramatic reasons. This has enabled Ubisoft to expand the game so it doesn't just follow the film scene for scene.

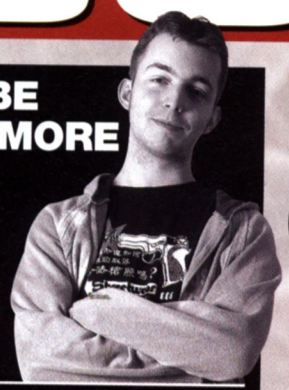
UM BONGO
It's hot in the jungle. Hot, wet, dark and a bit spooky. But mainly wet. Rain, lighting, mist and other visual effects come together to create a marvellously involving atmosphere, all interacting with echo-laden audio effects to put you right in the seat of the action.

SCHOOL OF ROCK
While it would have been fun to play as everyone's favourite Tenacious D rocker, it's far more enjoyable to see him run alongside you, panicking at the right moments, wisecracking and providing plenty of the comic relief. The likeness is good, too.

WATCH YOUR AMMO
In keeping with the period, you're not exactly bristling with guns while running around the jungle. Every shot counts, but once they're gone, you'll have to rely on the jungle to provide weapons. Crudely fashioned spears are the most common, giving a *Turok* feel to things.

BULLETIN

MAYBE ONE MORE



■ **NEWS EDITOR** Will Porter

Well, it finally happened. Had to really. My name is Will Porter and I'm addicted to *Pro Evolution Soccer 4*. It all started three years ago when my housemates started shutting themselves in their rooms and shouting bad things at each other. They even made their own cuss-words when the usual ones were worn out – stuff like 'jism monkey junkie' and 'cock munch bunch'. But their addiction was only just beginning. Now upon scoring a goal they pretend to hold guns and shout "Bubba-ba-Bang! Bubba-ba-Bang!" at each other. They also feel that this is normal behaviour. They scare me. Or at least they used to.

I thought I'd be getting away from it when I started at *PC ZONE*, but the last question in my interview was "Do you play *Pro Evo*?" I was strong. I said no, but eyes narrowed and boxes on paper remained unticked. I had nearly blown it.

When my tea-making skills eventually had me installed as professional flunkie at *ZONE*, the taint of *Pro Evo* surrounded me even more. Shouts, taunts, words from the north of England that I barely knew assailed me every day as I crouched over my kettle or put the shine into my editor's shoes. "Come and play with us, you twat!" they'd shout. "I keep on forgetting which buttons do what" I'd reply – doing my utmost to keep the taint of the game out of my pearly, swear-free conversation. I wouldn't descend to their carnal level. I'd *never* become an addict like them.

A week ago, I caved. Caved like a big hole in the ground that's full of stalactites, bats and things. I was drunk and angry. My housemate said "Just one Will, just one. It won't hurt. You can stop any time." And more fool me, but I believed him. I was France, he was England – and, maybe just to sweeten the pill, he let me score first. "Eat it, bastard!" I shouted. "Have it you mother-lover!" Again? "Well, maybe one more." Maybe one more... Maybe one more... Maybe one more...

PLAYING GOD



EVOLUTION, REVOLUTION AND A GAME WITH NO BOUNDARIES. WE MEET UP WITH WILL WRIGHT AND PUT *SPORE* UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

WE DON'T LIKE *The Sims*, but we do like its creator Will Wright – a man whose undiluted creative vision cross-bred with the vast resources provided by his monolithic paymasters at EA has just been waiting to create something marvellous. And now the marvellous thing is happening, and it's called *Spore*. We touched on it last issue, but having met with the man and heard it all first-hand, we're still reeling. He effectively has every one of us from the very moment he saunters into the presentation room at E3 and breaks the ice by handing out bits of meteorite from a large bowl.

"You start the game very small, with a single-cell creature living in a drop of water," begins Wright, as tiny organisms flitted around the screen behind him. "There are things that it can eat, and things that can eat it. If you click on it, you can modify it by, for example, adding a spike. That lets it attack things that it couldn't attack before. Over several generations, it gets larger, until it is 20mm in size or so. Then it scales up to a 3D creature living in the ocean.

"It then lives in a full 3D environment, with a whole ecosystem going on around it. When it lays an egg, you can go back to the editor, where you can design its skeletal structure. You can pull bits off, and sculpt your creature's body. The parts that you put on determine how your creature functions in this world. If, for example, you add legs to your creature and it no longer has fins, it cannot swim any more, so it will walk out onto land. All the animations are generated depending on the physics of the animal that you've designed."

LAND LUBBING

Now with the gigantic screen behind him showing his newly non-aquatic creatures, and with our furious nodding almost out of control, Wright smiles and dives further into his mysterious creation. "Out on land, the creature has to survive so it can, for example, hunt other creatures. The computer decides the best way to fight – in this example, my creature has a spiked tail so it uses the tail as the primary weapon," he says, gesticulating towards his on-screen lizard-things. "Here, a whole ecosystem is being simulated, populated by creatures coming from other players. As they play the game, their creatures are put in a database, while my game is requesting that database. Every bit of content is highly compressible – for example, a 3MB creature actually compresses to about 1KB." A game that's moulded by being online, when you're not actually playing online? Jaws start to hit the floor at the sheer ambition and audacity of the man.

"To get back to the editor in this phase, you have to reproduce, which involves finding a mate, so you get your animal to make a mating call," continues Mr Sims unabated. "In this way, I am indirectly controlling the evolution of my entire species – every creature born from it will have the modifications that I made. You can make weird, very very goofy creatures if you want. We studied things like Neopets and Pokémon, and think that players have a huge amount of empathy



Less a game, more a revolution.

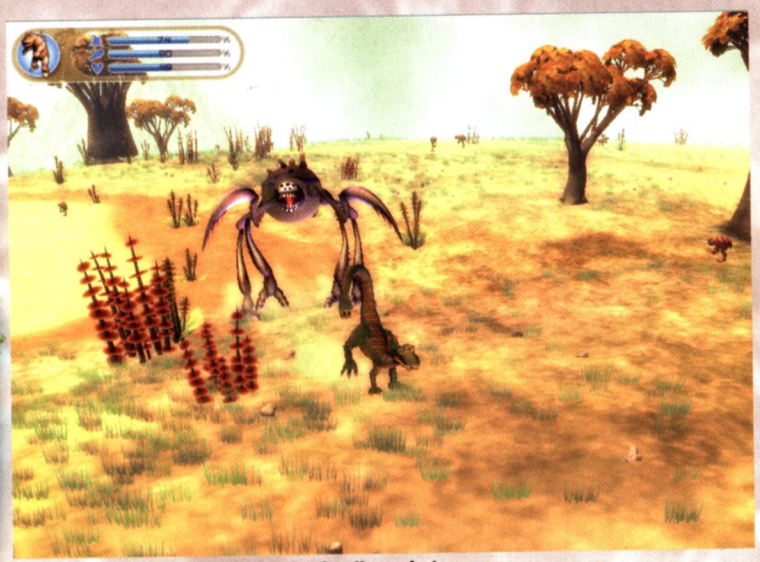

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Je m'appelle Alan Wake



Fend off the creations of friends, family and strangers.



Things start off small and end up extremely big.

with things that they designed themselves. You can, should you want, make a creature with six legs, and girls can design creatures that look cute." We agree, roll our eyes at the ineptitude of the fairer sex and laugh in condescending ways like the lads we are.

SWEET MUSIC

Getting back on track, Wright moves onto his creatures' brains. "When you get to the highest level of brain, you leave the evolution game and go to the tribal game, in which you are controlling a whole tribe," he explains, bringing up a screen reminiscent of many an RTS. "Your tribe of creatures can communicate and you can, for example, buy them weapons. You can buy them campfires, or a drum, so that they discover music, which might make them more ritualistic in the future. And you can upgrade the tribe's hut, grow the tribe larger and earn a higher level of tools."

Then we're into the city section of the game, already feeling as if we've been shown three amazing games in the space of ten minutes. Other tribes of the same species, yet with different cultures, set up shop nearby for trade and/or opposition. "You control your tribe with the city editor, which uses the AI of the game to understand the player and personalise the game to you. We've tried to build the simplest possible editor, which is easy enough that *Sims* players can use it, but is powerful," continues Wright as he plays first with Dr Seuss-like, and then sci-fi colours and designs.

"The next level is the civilisation level, where you are trying to build a nation by conquering cities, which you can do economically or culturally. You can capture cities by force or diplomacy, and you can even start a revolution. As you build roads and chain routes, you get a bigger and bigger overview, until you can see the entire planet. Now you are building a global super-power." This is where most developers would wrap up the presentation and head towards the door, but Wright's still only unveiled the top inch of his iceberg. Before we have time to think, there's a spaceship on the screen behind him.

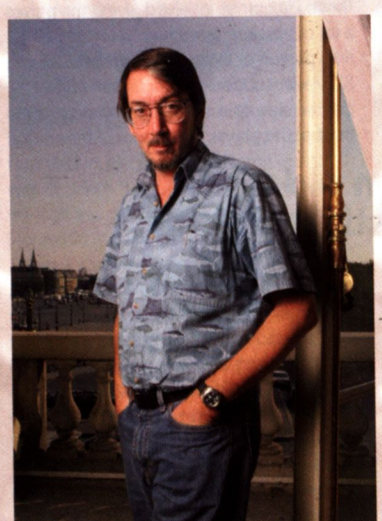
CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

"Here, I've unlocked a UFO, which can be used to beam up creatures," he explains. "Eventually, with your UFO, you can pull all the way out into space to see your solar system, in which each planet is a sandbox that you can sculpt. For example, the planet closest to the sun features a lot of lava." We look down and discover that the pool of drool at our feet is a centimetre deep.

"Let's fly to this craggy moon. The first thing you want to do is establish life on this planet. But if I drop a creature on it, the creature explodes, because it has no atmosphere. So we have to build an atmosphere. To do that, we initiate geological processes by, for example, going to the editor and dropping a volcano on the planet. That causes outgassing – we're trying to use fairly realistic processes. The editor here is like a very expressive paint program – you can put bases on your planet enclosed in bubbles, or make a whole civilisation under water. Bear in mind there are cheap tools and expensive ones. The most expensive one at this stage is a terraform device, which works on a planet in under a minute," explains Wright, perhaps showing his appreciation of both *Star Trek II* and *III*. "Now you can bring plants and animals in, and start establishing a colony, which earns you money to upgrade your UFO.

"For example, you can fit it with an interstellar drive. Now, we're trying to take the Hubble telescope objects that you've seen and bring them to life – the cursor now is basically a radio-telescope. You can listen to stars for signs of life and fly to those stars. They could be entire worlds that other people have created, which you can do anything to, but you won't mess up players' original copies of what they've created," he adds, reinforcing the slightly online mentality of his creation.

"Now you find a whole diplomacy game. You have to establish a shared language before you can communicate, which you do with a *Close Encounters*-style mini-game. This colony is firing rockets – they aren't friendly. If I have enough money, I get access to the best weapon, which blows up entire planets." Bloody hell, and we have to wait till next autumn? Sign us up now.



Head for business. Bod for sim.



***Spore* will ensure at least a Biology GCSE pass.**

- **Publisher:** EA
- **Developer:** Maxis
- **ETA:** Q3 2006
- **Website:** spore.ea.com

SPECIAL REPORT

BORN AGAIN

Movie remakes can be grim, so can videogame follow-ups do any better? How do you nail replay magic, asks *Pavel Barter*

TAKE OUT the old, bring in the, erm, old. That's the message from publishers, developers and bedroom programmers, who are currently rooting around in game bargain bins throughout the world. Their agenda? To find a long-lost and much-loved interactive corpse to resurrect. We've all felt that creeping sense of déjà vu when playing a new game; not only from painted-by-numbers first-person shooters and *Silent Hill* sequels, but also from remakes.

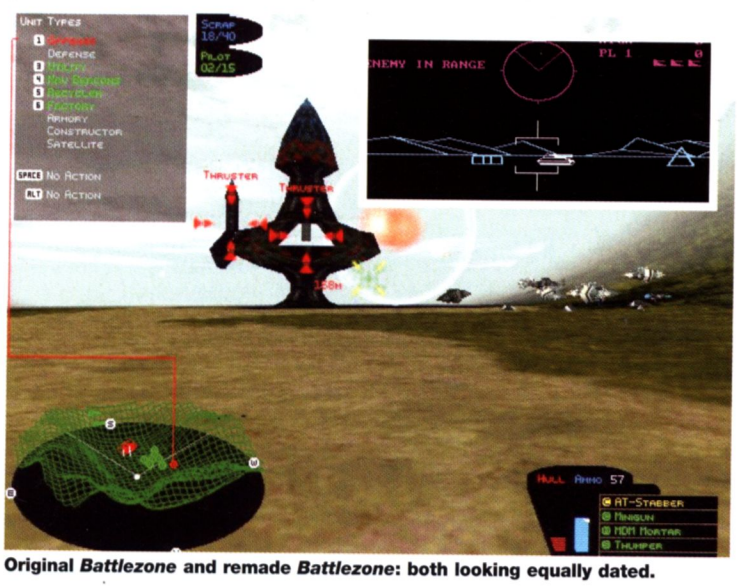
Of course, Hollywood has been at this makeover malarkey since Charlie Chaplin was a pin-up, so it was only a matter of time before videogames finally caught on. Thing is though, movie remakes are rarely anything but rubbish. Celluloid atrocities like *Get Carter*, *Psycho* or *The Stepford Wives* have proven that unearthing the past can be more sacrilegious than taking a dump in a cathedral. What are we letting ourselves in for? Former Sierra developer and remake expert, Josh Mandel, calms our nerves.

"Videogame remakes have greater potential than Hollywood to outshine their originals," he says. "In the gaming world, players completely understand why a game might need to be remade: the original no longer works on newer systems, or its graphics are far too crude. In Hollywood, though, remakes are mostly a losing proposition. People either say, 'It was a terrible movie to begin with, why would you want to make it again?', or they say, 'It was a wonderful movie to begin with, why mess with it?'"

Josh has a point. In recent years, aging 30-somethings have been getting plenty of "them were the days" mileage from retreads of old faithfuls like *Tempest*, *Frogger*, *Robotron*, *Defender*, *Spy Hunter*, *Pitfall* and the like. Valve recently dressed up *Half-Life* for the Source engine and the result, *Half-Life: Source*, offers a walk down memory lane accompanied by a few nifty water effects and Havok physics. OK, so it's like meeting an old flame who married a plastic surgeon but, shucks, them really were the days.

GOOD AS NEW

What's the secret to fashioning a remake masterpiece, an *Ocean's Eleven* instead of an *Italian Job*? You have to "recreate the same emotional impact of the game at the time of its release," advises Ed Rotberg, creator of legendary 1980 coin-op *Battlezone*. "In my opinion, this would probably require spending lots of hours with the original, trying to remember those early feelings. Then, using the capabilities of today's platforms and sticking with the same basic gameplay, trying to recapture some of that magic. It's a tall order."



Original *Battlezone* and remade *Battlezone*: both looking equally dated.



"Avast! etc." *Sid Meier's Pirates!* in its former and latter glory.

Noah Falstein is an industry veteran who designed classic titles like *Maniac Mansion* and *The Secret Of Monkey Island*. Falstein has also held gaming brainstorming sessions with the likes of George Lucas and Steven Spielberg. His approach is much the same as Rotberg's. "Having done quite a few games based on movies or movie characters, my approach is to try to capture the feel or player experience of the original property, but express it in the new medium.

"If you go to the trouble of doing a remake instead of creating a new title, a thorough understanding of the original title – and why it was popular – is an important first step. Then you can decide which elements to keep, which to abandon, and which to transform."

"It's like meeting an old flame who married a plastic surgeon"

Sometimes the name alone will sell a product, as any rubbish Elvis impersonator will tell you. According to Ed Rotberg, the 1998 remake of *Battlezone* was, "Activision's attempt to use the name of a game to market a new game. I don't have a real problem with that, but let's call it what it is. That game had very little to do with the original."

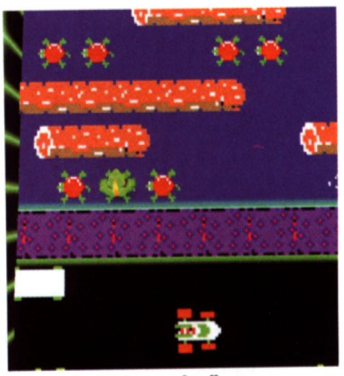
When it comes to the remake of *Sinistar*, a nerve-wracking shoot 'em up from 1983, creator Noah Falstein is less diplomatic.

"I wasn't consulted in the design of *Sinistar Unleashed*, and I have to say I was a bit disappointed. One of the trends I've seen in creating 3D remakes of old 2D games is a focus on the audio-visual realm and a blind spot where gameplay is concerned. Much of the gameplay in those 2D games involved giving the player a lot of visual information. Switching to first-person or even over-the-shoulder 3D views suddenly restricts that 360-degree view to a relatively narrow cone in front of the player. This can ruin the gameplay if it isn't taken into account in the gameplay restructuring."

Fuelled by nostalgia, and pissed off with publishers who abandon their favourite titles, some gamers have taken matters into their own hands. Fans of *Wing Commander: Privateer* crafted a 3D remake of the game, a mod based upon the open source *Vega Strike* engine. Once again players can carve a path through the solar system – choosing to be a







"Frogger: the first and only frog to have never learnt to swim."

Same game, prettier water.



Same Prince, added dimension, more goth.

trader, traitor, bounty hunter, or pirate – like *Elite* never went away.

PIXEL BOTOX

LucasArts's classic *Maniac Mansion* was also recreated in 2004 with spicier 2D graphics. "*Maniac Mansion* was the only classic LucasArts adventure that never had a 256-colour version," explains Sascha Borisow, the remake's creator. "It was only a question of time really – I'm sure we weren't the first ones to have the idea. Also its early SCUMM interface became really outdated. I think many *Day Of The Tentacle* fans never played its predecessor because of it."

Noah Falstein, who worked on the original project, hasn't seen the game but is flattered. On the other hand, co-creator Ron Gilbert discovered the remake and was chuffed. "I spent the night playing through the game, and it brought back incredible memories," he told its creators. "When I started playing I was sure I had forgotten all the puzzles, but after a few minutes, I was whipping through it." Borisow responds: "It's always a great satisfaction when former LucasArts designers notice our work." Although he adds that they've never heard from LucasArts themselves – who are presumed "too busy with making another 8,015 *Star Wars* games right now."

Fanboys are churning out remakes of retro classics like sweatshop shoe-makers. You don't have to look far to find 21st-century retreads of *Frantic Freddie*, *Robocop*, *Dr Who And The Daleks*, and other games from a time when a Commodore 64 was as enviable a possession as an Alienware laptop today.

However, in the big, bad, corporate games industry, fan remakes can be risky business. 3D Realms recently sicced their lawyers on to an amateur mod which was recreating *Duke Nukem 3D* using the Source engine. A group of *Ultima* fans creating a remake – *Ultima I: Reborn* – were also slapped on the wrist by corporate spoilsports EA.

Love 'em or hate 'em, remakes are part of the furniture. Advances in PC technology make a big difference in the overall realism and excitement of a game, and this will continue to fuel the remake market. But if you're thinking of making a gaming clone, remember Noah Falstein's words: "If there's nothing new to add, is there really any point?" PCZ

REVISITING THE GREATS

MAKE GRAPHICS LOOK AS GOOD AS YOU REMEMBER THEM BEING IN YOUR HEAD

SYSTEM SHOCK REBIRTH



Some say the old textures are far scarier, but this pack of graphical goodness for *System Shock II* certainly smooths out the wrinkles of an aging game. Find it at http://perso.wanadoo.fr/etienne.aubert/sshock/sshock_rebirth.htm

PRIVATEER

Space combat and trading reformed, remodelled and retextured by an open source community. Check out the *Wing Commander* universe, back in all its glory at www.priv.solsector.net



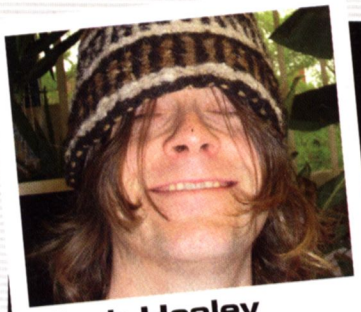
DARK FORCES

They haven't done the whole game yet, but should you want to play through the first three levels of Kyle Katarn's first *Doom*-cloned adventure rendered through the eyes of the recent *Jedi Academy*, then go to http://darkforces.jediknight.net

MANIAC MANSION

The forerunner to *Day Of The Tentacle*, reconstituted by Sascha Borisow and all his cronies to the delight of old LucasArts developers. Find it at http://people.freenet.de/lucasfangames/maniac/games_eng.htm





Mark Healey
Senior artist at Lionhead Studios and creator of *Rag Doll Kung Fu*

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?
Rag Doll Kung Fu, obviously, and *Live for Speed* (my mate Scawen coded it on his own). I don't have much time to play really. I like some of the stuff from the Retro 64 site as I still love my Commodore 64; I spend a fair bit of time trawling through old titles via an emulator.

What was the last videogame you finished playing?
WarioWare for the Nintendo DS – it's complete genius. Those guys really understand the word 'entertainment'.

What is your favourite game of all time?
Mario 64. Perfection. It's just so playable and has a real magical vibe.

What are you most proud of in your career?
Managing to retain my enthusiasm, despite lots of annoying producer/manager types, whose only talent seems to be getting invited to all the parties and hassling people about things they have no clue about.

Who do you most admire in the industry?
Shigeru Miyamoto/Nintendo, because he/they make the best computer games in the world.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?
Incompatibility, the constant need to buy another expensive graphics card and a million first-person shooters. Oh, you want good stuff? Okay, the growth of indie software is a very PC thing and very healthy. The main thing that consoles are missing for me is the ability to make your own game at home with your mates… without having to spend several thousand pounds on a dev kit. So that's where the PC has the edge for me.

What's the best thing about your job?
Working with Peter Molyneux – he's a great inspiration, very patient, and cool enough to let me develop *Rag Doll Kung Fu* in my own time and has let me keep it as my Intellectual Property (despite silly clauses in my contract!).

What's the worst thing about your job?
Working with Peter Molyneux.

What are you working on at the moment?
Apart from finishing *Rag Doll Kung Fu*, I'm on a very cool project with a working title *The Room*. We have a very small team (currently four people), but have made great progress. I think it's going to be very special indeed. The thing I like about it most is the focus on creativity as opposed to killing things.

What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?
Physics-based, massively multiplayer games, with force feedback groin attachments – keep your ear to the ground for 'dildonics'. (*Too late, see page 22 – Ed.*)

FORBIDDING TERRITORY

E3 2005 PART TWO



FIRST SCREENS AND INFO ON *ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS* BREAK COVER AT E3. RESULTS CAUSE EXCITEMENT

We've come a long way since *Wolfenstein*...

A GIANT FLAMING missile impacts with the ground just outside a human base. While the Earth Defence Force players scatter in all directions, a gigantic Goliath mech slowly strides out of the crater and starts its assault. Welcome back to the battle between the Strogg and Humanity, now about to enter into a truly online capacity from the company that brought you *Quake* (id, obviously) and its almost long-standing conspirators Splash Damage, responsible both for the excellent *RTCW: Enemy Territory* and the iffy *Doom 3* multiplayer.

Set before *Quake II* and based on the Strogg invasion of Earth before the interstellar human fight back, the game's colossal draw distance (thanks to something impressively called the technology of The Megatexture) will cover backdrops from the Antarctic to deserts and forests. With great landscapes comes great vehicles, and *ET: Quake Wars* looks like it'll rule the roost with these. The best we've seen are helicopters that look like evil Miles Mayhem's Switchblade chopper out of overlooked '80s cartoon, *Mask*. Among the usual legions of *BF*-style multi-seated jeeps, tanks and gun emplacements, there are some true gems – not least a massive Chinook-style 'copter that airlifts in EDF troops and vehicles, and Strogg Hornet flying vehicles that look like four-legged insects and can and scuttle around on the ground before buzzing into the air.



The old *UT* versus *Quake* debate prepares for reignition.

With a similar objective-based policy to the World War II *ET* contingent (albeit on a vaster scale), many new classes will be available on both sides – we've seen medics with *BF2*-style shock paddles for example – while we strongly suspect that there will be some form of commander mode as well. Meanwhile, rumour has it that a few Stroggs will also be able to inject dead humans with a serum that'll turn them into a host for a recently fallen Strogg player in need of a spawn point.

All this coupled with jump-jets, seemingly *PlanetSide*-esque bases and the tantalising prospect of playing as a Strogg – what's next out of the id back catalogue for the *Enemy Territory* treatment? *Commander Keen: Enemy Territory*? *Doom: Enemy Territory*? *Hexen: Enemy Territory*? You can but wonder. *Quake Wars* will be a proper commercial release, not a freebie like *Wolfie*, and we're all a-tremble just thinking about it.

- **Publisher:** Activision
- **Developer:** id/Splash Damage
- **ETA:** 2006
- **Website:** www.idsoftware.com

Sometimes the Strogg like to take a more hands-on approach...

Girls, girls, girls

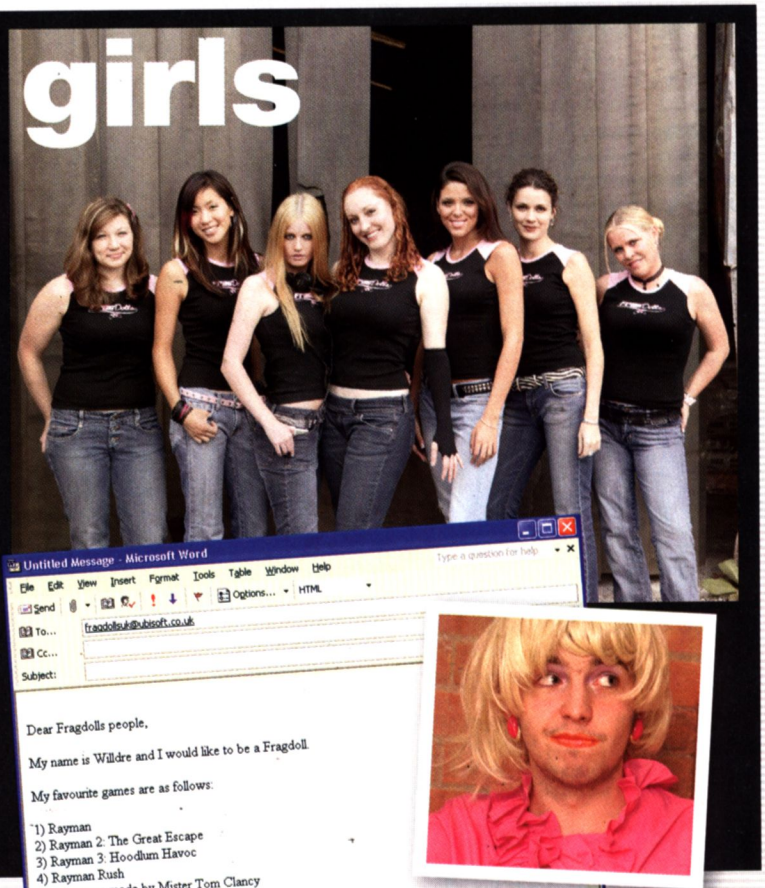
SEXY GAMING CLAN (AND MARKETING PLOY) THE FRAGDOLLS SET TO HIT THE UK

SOME GIRLS like games (it's true, we have one ourselves). This is a good thing, a laudable thing and something that should happen more. So you'd think that we'd welcome the FragDolls, seeing as they not only all like games but also (mostly) have shiny hair, nice teeth, breasts and the like. Thing is, all they seem to play are Ubisoft games. Weird that, isn't it? It's also strangely lucky that none of them are mingers. What's more, over at www.fragdolls.co.uk they're recruiting for a UK team of foxy deathmatch minxes.

A pre-fab clan designed to promote girl gaming (good thing), excite young boys (bad thing) and tout Ubisoft wares (suspicious thing), we got in touch with some established girl gamers from the prestigious Truth clan to pass judgement. "It's crazy how average girls just doing what they love can get elevated to such a high status, used as promotional tools, and enjoy it," says Anne Rogers, aka Jaffy. "Perhaps it can bring good to the US, and promote girls playing games, but spreading to the UK also? Soon these anomalous, low-skill teams will be seen as the norm, and that isn't what that majority of girl gamers want."

Team-mate Le1a, however, thinks it's a good thing both for Ubisoft and girl gaming, adding, "What female clan wouldn't want to be a part of the photoshoots, and effortlessly gain sponsors? Although this doesn't mean that it's right to objectify females just because they play games."

So is it a beautiful-only clique with a sinister sideline in marketing, or a publisher getting behind a worthy cause? Perhaps a bit of both, although if you look like a constipated bulldog licking piss off a thistle there's probably not much point in applying.





FREEWARE | HOME-BREWS | WEBGAMES | ABANDONWARE | EMULATION

FREEPLAY

Some of the best things in life are free! *Anthony Holden*'s got the proof...

FREEPLAY IS dedicated to bringing you the best free games content the Net has to offer, be it freeware, home brews, remakes, webgames or emulation – you'll never have to buy another game again. Strutting their stuff this month are sci-fi horror offering *The White Chamber* and the turret-tastic *Castle Attack 2*...



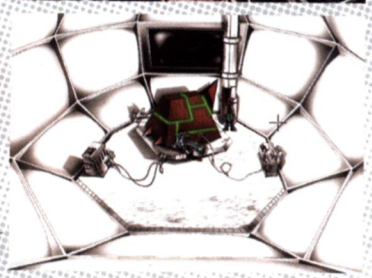
Pointing and clicking in the finest tradition.







Not that scary, but nicely put together.



This'll be the white chamber then.

THE WHITE CHAMBER

FREE GAME OF THE MONTH!

■ **Developer:** Studio Trophis ■ **Website:** www.studiotrophis.com

It's grim up North, and as if to prove it comes this sci-fi horror offering from Sheffield. Dubbed *The White Chamber*, it's a small but agreeably formed point-and-clicker, casting you as a young anime girl trapped on a lonely, gore-splattered space station. With only a dozen rooms in the entire game it's an extremely slight affair, but no less enjoyable for it. The graphics are crisp, the puzzles intelligent, and the horror moments well timed, with more than a hint of *Silent Hill* in the creepier sections.

Admittedly, the bright anime stylings do detract somewhat from any notion of actual fear, but there's still a good solid afternoon of puzzlement to be had here – and if you're really keen there are loads of easter eggs and four possible endings too. Just make sure you've got DivX installed or you'll miss out on the fancy anime cut-scenes.

GOLDEN OLDIE: DEADLY ROOMS OF DEATH: ARCHITECT'S EDITION

Download from: www.drod.net

Deadly Rooms Of Death is a cult classic of shareware gaming, blending light-hearted adventure with a unique puzzle dynamic. The sequel has just been released – see Indie Zone for our review – and to celebrate, we thought we'd point you in the direction of the original game, which is available for nowt on the developer's website.



UNIBALL

ON THE CD ON THE DVD

■ **Developer:** ByteRyder Productions
■ **Website:** www.uniball-central.net

Hockey in space. Not a concept given much airtime by the closed-minded folks at NASA, but one that lies at the core of *Uniball*, an online multiplayer sports game that's been burning away quietly in the dark recesses of the Internet for a good few years now. While the rules are as simple as can be – one ball, two goals, red team vs blue team – the key to the game's appeal lies in the enormous degree of skill attainable. Passing, bouncing, thrusting and ramming are all essential techniques if you want to enter the higher echelons of the sport, where a handful of hardcore squads wrestle for position in the community league tables.

The file clocks in at under 2MB, so don't expect much in the way of bells and whistles, but do expect some fierce and highly skilful competition – so skilful in fact that beginners are widely shunned on the regular servers.

There's definitely fun to be had here, but you'd better be prepared for a trial by fire – and practise that bank shot.



The reds and the blues face off once again.

FOOD FORCE

ON THE DVD

■ **Developer:** Deepend/Playerthree ■ **Website:** www.food-force.com

Remember all that money you put in Tsunami Relief buckets earlier this year? Well, we think we might have found where it went – into making the world's first 'humanitarian videogame'. *Food Force* is a free downloadable title designed to spread the good word about the UN's World Food Programme and teach overfed western brats the challenges of global hunger. Split into six simple mini-games, the game sees you flying information-gathering missions, dropping relief bundles, changing tyres on WFP trucks and performing a handful of other worthy deeds in the name of saving the hungry people of Sheylan.

As a game it's no more or less entertaining than most Java/Flash efforts, the main difference being the long briefings you have to endure between (not to mention during) levels. But of course that's the whole point. As young Will Porter puts it, "It's a bit shite, but its heart is in the right place."



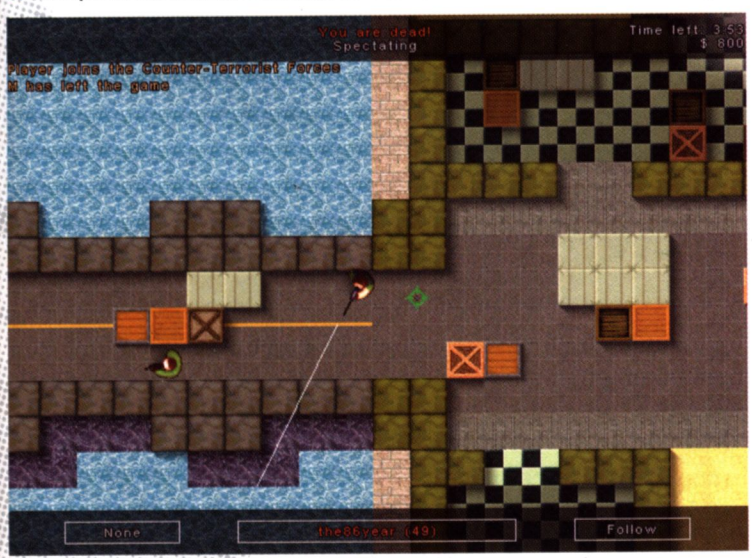


It's like videogame *Newsnight*.

It's got six mini-games!

COUNTER-STRIKE 2D

■ **Developer:** Unreal Software ■ **Website:** www.cs2d.com







The maps range from *CS* classics to fan-made homages to *GoldenEye*. If 3D acceleration had never been invented...

The initiative of a bored German teenager, *Counter-Strike 2D* is an attempt to replicate the classic *Half-Life* mod in glorious top-down 2D. It's still a work in progress, but has come a hell of a long way since we got wind of it a couple of years back.

Currently at Beta 0.1.0.1, the game now offers all the standard *CS* game types, dozens of quality maps (including Dust, Aztec and all your other *CS* faves) and even functional bots for single-player. Perhaps our favourite feature though is the option to have fog of war based on line of sight, which makes for a much more tense, cat-and-mouse experience.

Admittedly, the game is still peppered with bugs and hacks, and the network code leaves a lot to be desired, but (much like the original) if you can find a good server you're guaranteed a good game. The code was made open source in February, so hopefully the community will pitch in and make this the polished homage it deserves to be.

"If you can find a good server you're guaranteed a good game"

TOP 5... GAMES ABOUT FOOD



1. **CHUCKIE EGG**
   Get it from: www.chuckie-egg.org
2. **HARVEST MOON: BACK TO NATURE**
   Emulate it with ePSXe.com: www.epsxe.com
3. **YOSHI'S COOKIE**
   Emulate it with Jnes: www.jabosoft.com/jnes
4. **FOOD FIGHT**
   Emulate it with MAME: www.mame.net
5. **BURGER TIME**
   Emulate it with MAME: www.mame.net

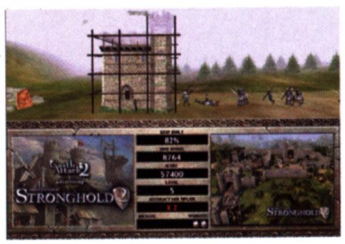
WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

CASTLE ATTACK 2

■ **Developer:** Firefly Studios
■ **Website:** www.globalstarsoftware.com/stronghold2/minigame

OK, we know we're a trifle late with this – *Stronghold 2* came out months ago, and this mini-game was put out to promote the game before that, but we just think it's great, all right?

Following in much the same vein as the previous *Castle Attack*, this mini-sequel has you defending a battlement against hordes of pikemen, knights and crossbowmen, who pile towards you in an attempt to knock down your castle. It's inordinately simple and repetitive, but there's just something wonderful about the way your enemies lurch over when they get an arrow in the neck, or run around screaming when you pour boiling oil on them. In fact, some of us think it's better than the game itself.



Shoot that poison arrow.

Do you have a favourite free game you'd like to share with *PC ZONE*? Have you made a free game and want to shout about it? Send details to mailbox@pczone.co.uk with 'Freeplay' in the subject heading.

EXCLUSIVE SET VISIT!

DOOM GETS REEL

PC ZONE EXCLUSIVE: *DOOM* MOVIE NOT CRAP – FIRST SHOTS AND DETAILS HERE!



"The mood and pace of the film looks set to follow in the footsteps of classics such as *Aliens*"

"That contact lens must be around here somewhere..."

FORGET EVERYTHING you've heard. The *Doom* movie is coming to cinemas this October, and despite all the chat on the Net about how the vision of the game has been trashed and the fans betrayed, it simply ain't so. Take it from *PC ZONE* – we had the pleasure of visiting the Prague set of *Doom* earlier this year, where we met the cast and crew and saw first-hand the film taking shape. And the cold truth is: it could actually be great.

Admittedly, we too had feared the worst – not only because there's *never* been a good film based on a videogame (don't even start with that *Resident Evil* nonsense), but because we'd heard the rumours too. If you missed the controversy, the original scriptwriter went a bit feral when his story was changed, and posted on forums moaning that the film was going to be rubbish and nothing like the game.



Sarge and The Kid (Al Weaver) make their way to Dr Carmack's lab.

IT AIN'T SO!

In fact, all that's really happened is that the satanic references have been ditched, so the creatures now come from 'another dimension' rather than Hell, and arrive through a 'wormhole' rather than a big red portal surrounded by pentagrams and flaming skulls. Big deal – it's a bit of a timid move, but ultimately it has little bearing on the action.

Having seen some of this action being filmed, we can assure you that for all intents and purposes the movie *is* the game. Walking around the sets is freakishly reminiscent of being inside the UAC Base, from the pipes and grates right down to the logos on the door switches. The imps look like imps; the Hell Baron looks like a Hell Baron (though of course, it's just 'Baron' now); Karl Urban, who stars as John 'Reaper' Grimm, even looks a little like Doomguy. Plus, there's a ten-minute sequence shot in first-person, with a HUD, health readout and everything.



Sarge (The Rock) and Destroyer (Deobia Oparei) get spooked by a moth.

HIDE BEHIND THE SOFA...

Better yet, the mood and pace of the film looks set to follow in the footsteps of classics such as *Aliens* – you've got a squad of marines, some serious firepower (including chainsaws and BFGs) and deadly creatures picking the good guys off one by one. Tension is further developed through the unsympathetic Sarge character played by Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson, and the appearance of John Grimm's estranged sister, played by the icy Rosamund Pike. Dexter Fletcher of *Press Gang* fame even gets a look-in as 'Pinky' – but we'll leave it to your imagination what happens to him.

The film is currently slated to hit the UK on October 28. Closer to the event we'll be bringing you a full in-depth feature including interviews with all the major stars and some of the SFX and creature experts who helped bring the game to life – as well as hearing reactions from id. And before you ask, yes, The Rock is a very nice guy and no, he won't be doing the People's Elbow on a Hell Knight. PZ

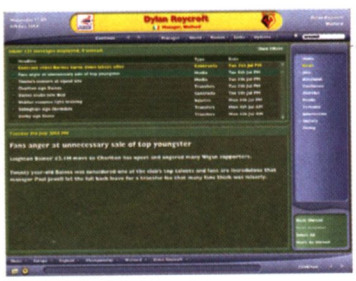


FUNNY OLD GAME

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006 INTRODUCES MEDIA RELATIONS AND HALF-TIME PIZZA THROWING...

WITH ITS dominance over *Champ Man* now carved into history, Sports Interactive has unveiled its newest iteration of *Football Manager* – now replete with an assortment of nifty extra features designed to make you feel as if you're a real battle-hardened manager instead of the sad reality of being a bleary-eyed bloke bathed in the glow of your monitor.







First off, you'll be able to negotiate with your board of directors on all manner of subjects, as well as use media opinion to your advantage while angling for a better contract for yourself or your players, bigger transfer budgets and the like. Threaten to leave, tell the papers how unhappy you are or throw toys out of your proverbial pram too much though and you may well be left with nothing but a P45 and a short career in punditry...

TEA CUPS AT DAWN

In the game proper, SI promises far better interaction with your team come half-time – singling out players for praise in a tactic-screen team-talk (or perhaps kicking boots in their well-groomed faces). This may cause a second-half Scouse-rout – or have your team crumble like Delia Smith's face in the last game of the season...

SI is also aware that most people couldn't be arsed with training in the last game, preferring to leave it all on automatic. So simplification is now the name of the game, making it far easier to work out training schedules and liaise with coaches to bring your men to fighting fitness.

Elsewhere, there's added stats on just how big a bastard the man in black is, while the player positions indicator has been buffed up as well – showing how the players themselves would rather be played. We're getting quite scared by the amount of spare time *FM2006* is going to steal from us, so if *ZONE* mysteriously disappears some time this autumn, you'll know why...

- **Publisher:** Sega
- **Developer:** Sports Interactive
- **ETA:** Q3 2005
- **Website:** www.sigames.com/fm



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THE LATEST BUZZ

VIRTUAL SEX BECOMES A REALITY WITH KOREAN SHAG 'EM UP, *3FEEL*

LONELY MASTURBATORS rejoice! The first fully 3D massively multiplayer sex simulation is here, complete with motion-captured rutting and vibrating USB peripherals. It's called *3Feel*, and it was one of the more bizarre offerings at this year's E3, wedged between fantasy MMORPGs and baseball games on Korea's Game Infinity stand. A massively multiplayer affair, it allows you to create a sexy avatar, log on and perform explicit sex acts with other characters, as motion captured by real Korean porn stars. Prior to the act, you are also able to employ a variety of seduction techniques such as dancing and whispering sweet nothings through a headset, with the option of voice modulation for the benefit of known sex pests.



A variety of positions are available, including doggy.



Oh baby baby...



Teledildonics have arrived.

A full range of foreplay moves is available, achieved by clicking on various parts of your partner's anatomy, which can be matched in the real world by artful positioning of the two teledildonic devices that ship with the game. A webcam can also be employed for a windowed view of your real lover, though we suspect this will prove less popular. Though no shipping date has yet been confirmed, developer CMnet is planning on launching the game in Europe, Asia and the US. Needless to say the core audience will be almost exclusively male, which begs the question, does having virtual sex with another man make you gay? Perhaps anticipating this, the slogan for the game is 'Enjoy The Change', a piece of advice we treat with some trepidation.

- **Publisher:** TBC
- **Developer** CMnet
- **ETA:** TBC
- **Website:** www.e3-korea.com/c05.html

WEST LIFE

ONLY THE FASTEST GUN SURVIVES IN WILD WEST SHOOTER *CALL OF JUAREZ*

WE'VE SAID IT before, but the Wild West is a seriously underused setting for PC games. The last serious attempt to conquer this untamed ground was the flatulent *Dead Man's Hand*, but a new hope has just ridden into town in the form of *Call Of Juarez*.

Billed as a 'serious, deep shooter', *Call Of Juarez* is promises a strong emphasis on plot and character, establishing a classic Hollywood conflict between two gun-slinging antiheroes. In a nice twist, you actually get to play both these characters: there's Billy, the desperate renegade and Reverend Ray, the righteous bounty hunter who wants him dead or alive.

We spent some time playing the game at E3, and were impressed by both the dusty, tumbleweed-strewn atmosphere and the pleasing variety of action. Billy, for example, often requires a stealthy approach to his missions, while Ray is more the all-guns-blazin'-type, thwarting bank robberies and rounding up ne'er-do-wells as he goes. Shootouts occur both on foot and from the saddle, and you can switch to a slow motion 'confrontation mode' during gunfights to help take out your foes quickly and cleanly.



Some famous characters of the day will make an appearance.



The AI's much better than in *Chrome*.

Surprisingly, *COJ* is from the same chaps who brought us the ropey FPS *Chrome*, but from what we've seen there's little to compare the two. The so-called Chrome engine has progressed in leaps and bounds, and now offers proper physics and next-gen graphical effects. It all looks promising, so we're going to give Techland another chance, just this once.

- **Publisher:** TBC
- **Developer:** Techland
- **ETA:** Q1 2006
- **Website:** www.techland.pl



All the guns are 100 per cent historically accurate, so we're told.



What a load of tank.



Best in-game reeds ever?



Giving Jerry a bit of what-ho.

Point of no return

TURNING POINT ASKS YOU TO OPEN UP YOUR HISTORY BOOKS AND RIP OUT THE PAGES

WORLD WAR II. Again. If it wasn't for the appalling waste of human life and undue suffering that it caused, you almost wish there'd been some other conflicts in the 20th century for people to make games about instead. But wait... This RTS is ever-so slightly different – and it also looks really rather good.

What if Hitler got killed at the start of World War II and someone a bit less mad took over and said: "Actually, it looks a bit nippy over there in Russia, let's go and murder people somewhere a bit less tactically stupid." *Turning Point* answers this question, presenting to you a World War II with different boundaries, different events (such as the bombing of New York) and a full complement of all the secret weapons that were designed by Nazi boffins but never put into action.

By the people who brought you *Haegemonia* and (cough) *D-Day*, this one's looking really quite lovely – check out them reeds and bull-rushes.

- **Publisher:** CDV
- **Developer:** Digital Reality
- **ETA:** 2006
- **Website:** www.digitalreality.hu



Ah, a Messerschmitt type B plane thingy...

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THE MAN WHO KNOWS

A SERVANT of god has denounced computer and videogames as the **work of the devil**, while attempting to line his own pious pockets with their proceeds. **Reverend Ralph Bagley**, 41, proclaimed: "I have always been a gamer since the days of *Pong* and *Pac-Man*. But as the **games got nastier**, I was getting pretty conflicted about coming home from **church** and playing things like *Doom* and *Quake*. I began to look for something else, but there was a **gaping hole** in the market."

To this end, Bagley, who has two children, founded the **Christian Game Developers Foundation**, aiming to lure decent, right-thinking gamers into a terrifying world of resurrection, pointy crosses and holy water. Bagley preached: "Simply forbidding our children from playing videogames is not the answer. We have to give them **quality alternatives** that match the excitement of secular games while promoting **Christian values** – without the violent or sexually explicit content. **No blood, no guts, no gore**. What we want are emotionally full games that don't just rely purely on adrenalin. We are trying to build the genre of Christian gaming. People are tired of having these violent, demonic games dictating to their kids." So now you know...

Meanwhile, a key industry figure has dismissed computer and videogames as the **playthings of feckless, hairy-palmed males** with too much spare time. President of US trade body the **Entertainment Software Association**, Doug Lowenstein, scoffed: "Our own industry, mainly through our marketing practices, reinforces the stereotype that most gamers are men. We need a cultural shift so that young girls and women feel that playing games is **not a testosterone-monopolised hobby** reserved for their boyfriends and husbands, or the province of an elite few who speak their own language, congregate in chat rooms and have an endless amount of time on their hands. If games aspire to **movie-like status**, then games need to become topics of conversation at dinner parties." Until that happens you'll have to make do with some **tedious knob** droning on about how much his house is worth. Pass the railgun, dear.

"If games aspire to movie-like status, then games need to become topics of conversation at dinner parties"

DOUBLE FLASHPOINT

E3 2005 PART TWO

BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE BREAKS SILENCE ON THE SEQUEL TO *FLASHPOINT* AND REVEALS NEW TITLE *ARMED ASSAULT*



It's *Flashpoint 1.5*. Except not.

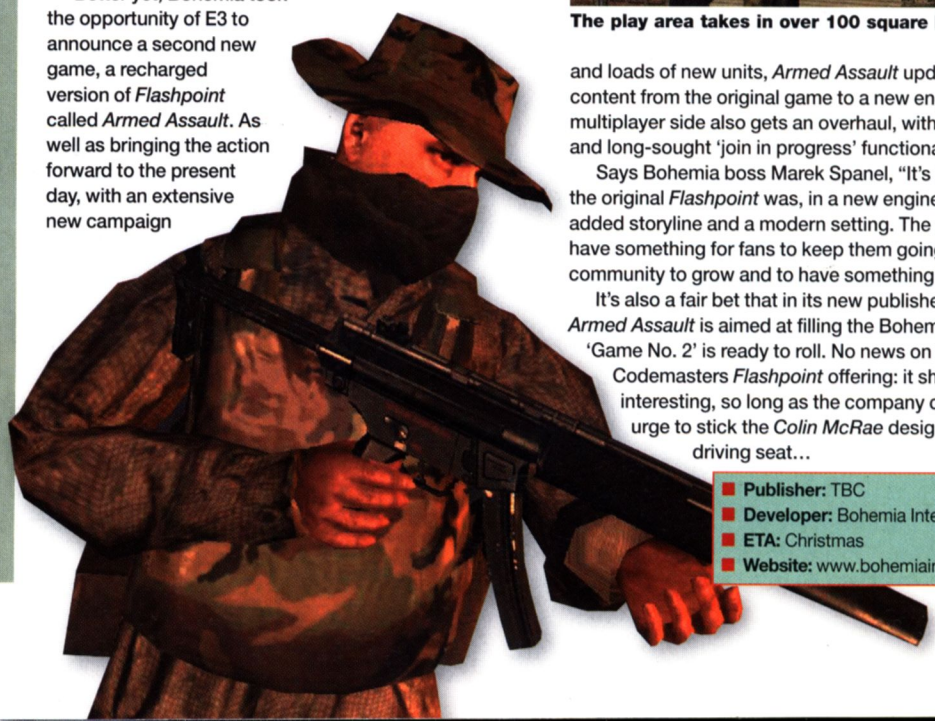
WE MUST ADMIT to being a little bit confused about the future of *Operation Flashpoint* prior to E3. We'd already heard rumours that Codemasters had ditched developer Bohemia Interactive and taken the award-winning franchise in-house. But we'd also spoken to Bohemia and set up a meeting to see the new sequel with our own eyes. So what gives?

Well, Codies and Bohemia have split, for whatever reason. The rights to the Flashpoint name reside with Codies, while every other bit of IP (which is to say, the game) belongs to Bohemia. As such, *Flashpoint 2* is still very much in progress, but now goes by the codename 'Game No. 2', or 'New Game From The Creators Of *Operation Flashpoint*'. For the sake of convenience we're calling it *OFP2*, and you can read all about it on page 60.

Better yet, Bohemia took the opportunity of E3 to announce a second new game, a recharged version of *Flashpoint* called *Armed Assault*. As well as bringing the action forward to the present day, with an extensive new campaign and loads of new units, *Armed Assault* updates all the content from the original game to a new engine. The multiplayer side also gets an overhaul, with new netcode and long-sought 'join in progress' functionality.



The play area takes in over 100 square kilometres.



Says Bohemia boss Marek Spanel, "It's basically what the original *Flashpoint* was, in a new engine, with a new added storyline and a modern setting. The reason is to have something for fans to keep them going, for the community to grow and to have something to sell."

It's also a fair bet that in its new publisher-less state, *Armed Assault* is aimed at filling the Bohemia coffers until 'Game No. 2' is ready to roll. No news on the official Codemasters *Flashpoint* offering: it should be interesting, so long as the company can resist the urge to stick the *Colin McRae* design team in the driving seat...

- **Publisher:** TBC
- **Developer:** Bohemia Interactive
- **ETA:** Christmas
- **Website:** www.bohemiainteractive.com

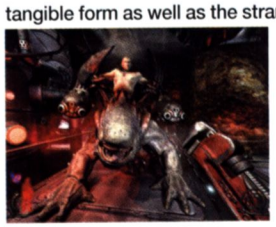
ROUND-UP

HERDING CURIOUS NUGGETS OF GAMING INFO INTO AN EASILY DIGESTIBLE PEN



POWER XSTREAM!

With news that the *Half-Life 2* expansion *Aftermath* is set to be made available in tangible form as well as the strange vapour of Steam (hoorah!), it emerges that 3D Realms' highly exciting *Prey* project is also lined up for digital distribution – on a service known as xStream. Times, it seems, are a-changing.



POCKET OR TWO

Thief fans (the scariest and most dedicated of all fans in the known world) have been busying themselves creating an unofficial expansion for *Thief 2* – and don't you know it's really quite good. So dust off *The Metal Age* and download it from www.thief2x.com – it's got 13 levels, a female lead character, and with five years of community work it tastes mighty fine.



UNOPENED VAULT

Well, no *Fallout 3* at E3. Boo! But Bethesda's tinkering with the 'bestest licence in the whole world ever' (according to some notable industry figures) was at least on show in the form of a poster. Industry sources claim that the poster was either put up with Blu-Tack or some kind of sellotape. Beyond that we know nothing.



CHANGING GEARS

Xbox 360 launch title and showcase game of Unreal Engine 3, *Gears Of War* is set to appear on PC – albeit far off in the ether. The thinking seems to be that it'll appear on your desktop in the same belated way that *Halo* did – so we'll have to be patient.



Good Fop Bad Fop

GOOD FOP



A sudden upsurge in *Pro Evolution Soccer* players resulting in fresh abuse, fresh insults and, largely, fresh meat for the Seftonator.

Will finally re-cracking the Sainsburys price-cutting system. Forty pence for a slightly out-of-date dinner for one? Just when they thought he was out, they drag him straight back in...

That Liverpool game. Wow.

BAD FOP

Emily Ford, our marketing manager and all-star cake-eater, leaving to pursue a career in gambling.

The revelation that our usually reserved and sensible art editor actually has the mindset of a teenage, thrill-seeking danger-mentalist. And, now, a broken toe.



Will finding himself alone in a pub with a large group of swingers having a pre-copulation drink. We still don't know how he does it.

Good Fop: **John Keats** (1795-1821), very much the Bez of the Romantic generation. Bad Fop: **Lord George Gordon Noel Byron** (1788-1824), largely a cad and a bounder.

THEY LIVE AGAIN...

ZOMBIES JUST WANNA HAVE FUN IN UNDEAD SHOOTER *CITY OF THE DEAD*



Four players take on zombies in co-op multiplayer.



Saturday afternoon shopping was getting more dangerous.

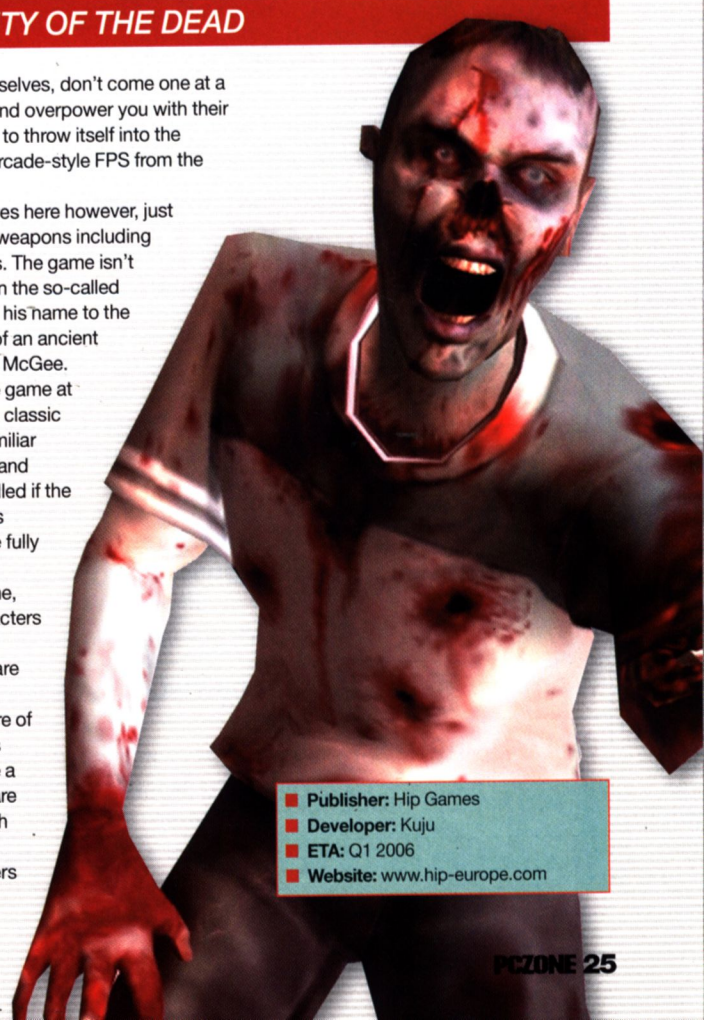
ZOMBIE GAMES, like zombies themselves, don't come one at a time. They form an unstoppable horde and overpower you with their sheer weight of numbers. The latest title to throw itself into the seething mass is *City Of The Dead*, an arcade-style FPS from the makers of *Microsoft Train Simulator*.

You won't be shunting any locomotives here however, just butchering the undead with a variety of weapons including shotguns, harpoon guns and land mines. The game isn't connected to any film per se, but is set in the so-called 'world of George Romero', who has lent his name to the project (some say unwillingly) because of an ancient contract previously owned by American McGee.

Whatever his actual involvement, the game at least bears some of the hallmarks of the classic films. The 18-odd levels take in such familiar settings as shopping malls, graveyards and woodlands, and zombies can only be killed if the brain is destroyed. A high level of gore is promised, to which end zombies can be fully and bloodily dismembered.

There's a very arcade feel to the game, with bonuses for combos, hidden characters to unlock and various items to collect. Around 40 'fun, post-pub' mini-games are also promised.

When asked how the repetitive nature of killing zombies will be countered, Kuju's James Broosby blurted: "We have quite a variety of zombies. We have ones that are slightly faster, ones that throw, ones with helmets, ones that leap, ones on fire..." Clearly not the most hardcore of shooters then, but mindless fun nonetheless.



- **Publisher:** Hip Games
- **Developer:** Kuju
- **ETA:** Q1 2006
- **Website:** www.hip-europe.com

CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhauser gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like UK gaming charts in rain. Time to die...

ChartTrack

TOP 10

elspa Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association



So it's almost as good as *World Of Warcraft*, but you don't have to pay for it every month? Sign us up! That said, how can we leave our lovingly crafted *WOW* identities in the lurch? Conflict: *Guild Wars* is thy name.

		TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	NEW	**GUILD WARS**	NCSOFT	94%
2	▲	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5	EIDOS	50%
3	NEW	IMPERIAL GLORY	EIDOS	85%
4	▼	THE SIMS 2: UNIVERSITY	EA	57%
5	▼	WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES	95%
6	▲	HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES	97%
7	▼	FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005	SEGA	90%
8	▼	THE SIMS 2	EA	82%
9	NEW	EMPIRE EARTH II	VU GAMES	80%
10	▼	STRONGHOLD 2	TAKE 2	85%



The battle of the stealing-land-from-indigenous-peoples sims sees *Imperial Glory*'s number three proclaimed as high and mighty over *Empire Earth II*'s low and weedy number eight. Maybe Empire will strike back next month.



You can't hear anything through these pages as this is a written medium. If you could, you'd be witness to the sickening sound of metal smashing through skull. That's us headbutting rusty nails with *Champ Man* at number two.



Now *Stronghold 2* has been doing really well, and that's not even taking into account all the rabid German fans. Can we have some applause at the back for UK developers Firefly? A bit more? Thanks, you've been a great audience.

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

OMFG EA r teh n00bs, tey suck lolz!!111! *Sims* is 4 grls n stoopid kids!1!1
Spudy2000

Guild Wars in its rightful place! Huzzah! etc!
Liquid_metal

Guild Wars is an anagram of 'God I'm glad people have stopped thinking up anagrams for chart comments'.
Escaped Monkey

Virgin megastores TOP 10

1. WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES
2. BOILING POINT	ATARI
3. EMPIRE EARTH II	VU GAMES
4. IMPERIAL GLORY	EIDOS
5. COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WARS	CDV
6. THE MATRIX ONLINE	SEGA
7. DOOM 3: RESURRECTION OF EVIL	ACTIVISION
8. STRONGHOLD 2	TAKE 2
9. THE SIMS 2: UNIVERSITY	EA
10. FREEDOM FORCE VS TTR	DIGITAL JESTERS

COMPETITION

Virgin megastores

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B 911 degrees fahrenheit
C A warm sunny day

Send your answers on a postcard to: *PC ZONE* Chart Compo Issue 157, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Closing date: July 20, 2005

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to *PC ZONE*.

For general competition terms and conditions, turn to page 7.

INCOMING!

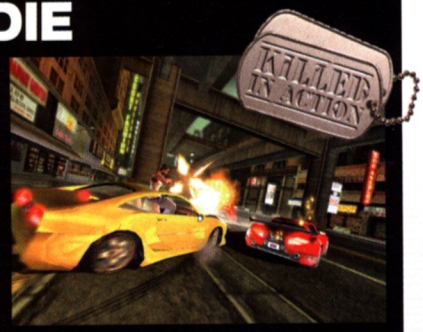
PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. ALL APPROXIMATE MONTHLY DATES ARE CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

JUNE	
AREA 51	MIDWAY
BATTLEFIELD 2	EA
CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH	TAKE 2
GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS	ROCKSTAR
MOTO GP: ULTIMATE RACING TECHNOLOGY 3	THQ
ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3: SOAKED!	ATARI
JULY	
BRIAN LARA INTERNATIONAL CRICKET	CODEMASTERS
DUNGEON SIEGE II	MICROSOFT
THE BARD'S TALE	UBISOFT
WORMS 4: MAYHEM	CODEMASTERS
AUGUST	
BET ON SOLDIER	DIGITAL JESTERS
EARTH 2160	DEEP SILVER
Q3 2005	
BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY	SCI
COMMANDOS: STRIKE FORCE	EIDOS
CONFLICT: GLOBAL TERROR	SCI
DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY	FUNCOM
FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS	MICROSOFT
F.E.A.R.	VU GAMES
HALF-LIFE 2: AFTERMATH	VALVE SOFTWARE
HEART OF EMPIRE	DEEP SILVER
ROME: TOTAL WAR – BARBARIAN INVASION	ACTIVISION
SERIOUS SAM 2	TAKE 2
STARGATE: SG-1 – THE ALLIANCE	JOWOOD
STARSHIP TROOPERS	EMPIRE
STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT II	ACTIVISION
STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR	ACTIVISION
STUBBS THE ZOMBIE	ASPYR
TIMESHIFT	ATARI
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION
THE SUFFERING: TIES THAT BIND	MIDWAY
TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND	EIDOS
X3: REUNION	DEEP SILVER
Q4 2005	
AGE OF EMPIRES III	MICROSOFT
BLACK & WHITE 2	EA
CALL OF DUTY 2	ACTIVISION
CIVILIZATION IV	TAKE 2
CONDEMNED	SEGA
GHOST RECON 3	UBISOFT
FAHRENHEIT	ATARI
HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY	EIDOS
KING KONG	UBISOFT
PREY	TAKE 2
PRINCE OF PERSIA 3	UBISOFT
QUAKE 4	ACTIVISION
RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR	MIDWAY
SPELLFORCE II: BLEND OF PERFECTION	JOWOOD
THE GODFATHER	EA
THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO	ATARI
TOCA RACE DRIVER 3	CODEMASTERS
2005	
ADVENT RISING	TBA
PSYCHONAUTS	TBA
2006	
BIOSHOCK	TBA
COMPANY OF HEROES	THQ
ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS	ACTIVISION
JUST CAUSE	EIDOS
HELLGATE: LONDON	NAMCO
SPORE	EA
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL	THQ
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007	MIDWAY

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

187: RIDE OR DIE



Ubisoft's 'Firing an Uzi out of a bling car while driving dead fast' game has been canned for PC – presumably due to the consoleyness of the whole shebang. Maybe PC owners weren't thought 'street' enough for the 'pimping' it would provide.

- **Publisher:** Ubisoft
- **Developer:** Ubisoft
- **ETA:** KIA
- **Website:** www.187game.com

STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR



What with Lord Vader having riiiiisen, the younglings having met a grisly end and Yoda revealing that good relations with the Wookiees, he has – it would be nice to fiddle with this *Homeworld*-cum-land war RTS. Anakin's first foray into interstellar diplomacy is having to wait until next spring, though.

- **Publisher:** Activision
- **Developer:** Petroglyph
- **ETA:** Spring 2006
- **Website:** www.lucasarts.com

EL MATADOR



The South American shooter which has had a lot of its gusto stolen by *Boiling Point* (despite its many sins) still looks like a decent lo-fi blast. Now delayed till next year, here's hoping that the graphics don't get too dated, too quickly.

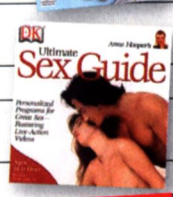
- **Publisher:** Cenega
- **Developer:** Plastic Reality
- **ETA:** Q2 2006
- **Website:** www.elmatador.net

TOP 10 *ZONE*'s favourite PC edutainment gaming titles...

1. **ENJIE BENJY: TIME FOR TEAMWORK!** (Turn your toddler into a corporate capitalist slave!)
2. **BEAR & PENGUIN'S BIG READING ADVENTURE** (Having watched Slipknot they burn down the toilets)
3. **MARY KING'S RIDING STAR & EQUESTRIAD** (She's no Pippa Funnell)
4. **NODDY: LET'S GET READY FOR SCHOOL** (Noddy would have been beaten up at school. He's made of wood.)
5. **BECOME A BRITISH ISLES EXPLORER** (By sitting inside on a computer? Witchcraft!)
6. **LITTLE ROBOTS: MAKING FRIENDS** (DY-56-89-00 meet Robbie. He's a robot too)
7. **PINGU: A BARREL OF FUN** (Actually, we'd quite like this one...)
8. **SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS TYPING** (This one too...)
9. **TWEENIES: MESSY TIME MAGIC** (Saw a video in Amsterdam with almost the same title)
10. **ANNE HOOPER'S ULTIMATE SEX GUIDE** (She's up for anything. Anything at all.)







SOURCE: UK bureau of games developers who would much rather be designing headshots.

IS THERE A GAMING CHART YOU'D LIKE TO SEE HERE? SEND IT IN AND IF WE PRINT IT, YOU'LL GET A *PC ZONE* GOODIE BAG!

HOT SHOTS



ALAN WAKE

ON THE CD ON THE DVD

Forget Payne, there's a new hero in town. And he's just as troubled...

REMEDY is creating a marvel. It really, truly is. We've seen the game in motion, with its *Twin Peaks*-style mountain town and vast play areas and we're mightily impressed. Perhaps the most amazing thing is the way that the Remedy team has used weather effects and their day and night cycle to change the mood and feel of *Wake's* gloomy environs. At the tap of a button, the team whizzed its tech demo from day to night and from storm to sun – all in a split-second, and looking like something in the old '60s *Time Machine* film, only far, far better. With sun streaming through trees on the mountainside, simply thousands of shadows were cast on the landscape – even mountains had been given vast shadows to throw on the land, depending on the position of the sun.

But away from all this leaf-blowing and choppy water, what about the gameplay? Well, not much of it is on show just yet – but we did get the chance to see Alan illuminating dark corners with his torch and moving portable lights around to chase away the darkness that his pursuing evil thrives upon. We watched, for example, as Alan drove a decrepit car to a lighthouse – itself casting some amazing light effects all round it. Looking worried, he climbed out of the car and ran to a fence that he couldn't get through – and as he turned he was faced by hooded dark figures, standing and waiting for him. The music then rose to a crescendo and the screen flickered out. More please.



- **Publisher:** TBA
- **Developer:** Remedy
- **ETA:** 2006
- **Website:** www.alanwake.com

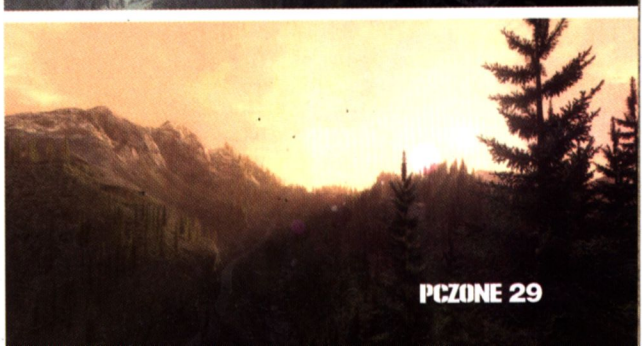

Diner
RIGHT'S DINER











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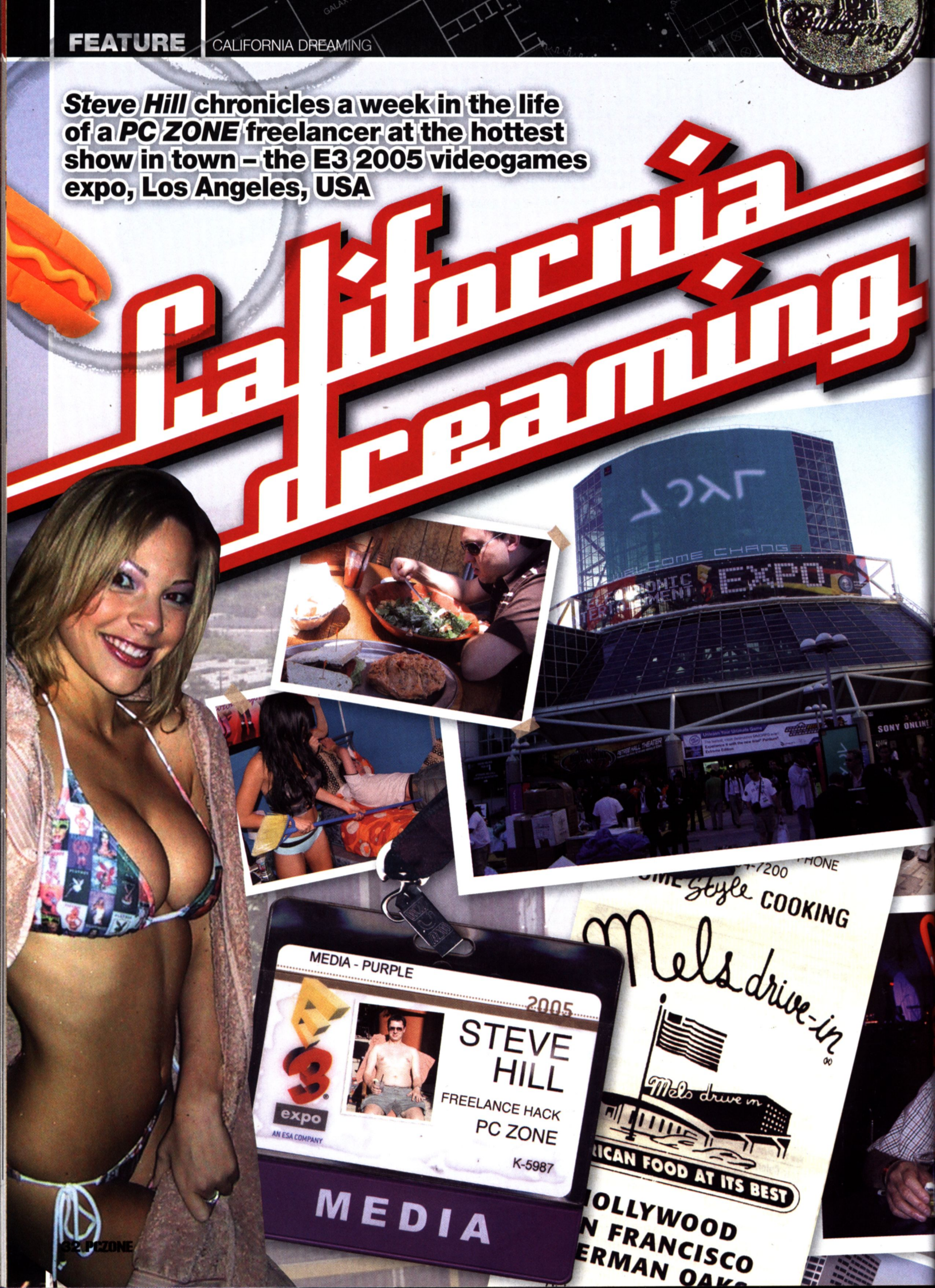
Sequel to GameSpy's PC Game of the Year

12+
www.pegi.info

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Steve Hill chronicles a week in the life of a PC ZONE freelancer at the hottest show in town – the E3 2005 videogames expo, Los Angeles, USA

California Dreaming



THERE'S A BIT at the beginning of Brit gangster flick *Sexy Beast* where a Speedo-clad Ray Winstone declares that it's "too f**king hot". He's obviously never been to E3, a teeming mass of sweating humanity gathered together in stifling downtown LA, this year enduring record temperatures. The Electronic Entertainment Expo seems to come round quicker each year, reminding us both of the futility of our existence and of the fleeting nature of the games industry. Last year's big new thing is in this year's bargain basement, whereas cutting-edge technology is swiftly rendered blunt by the passing of time.

Not to worry, at least we get pissed for free. It was the author Henry Sambrooke Leigh who described "the rapturous, wild and ineffable pleasure of drinking at somebody else's expense". Enjoying such privileges this year are a shadow squad of me, Sefton and Holden, with Pratchett also believed to be somewhere in the ether. Kicking off early, we waste little time in getting tucked in at Heathrow's Terminal 3, with myself and Sefton getting a final fix of real beer and real football with a few cold ales during the titanic battle of West Ham vs Ipswich.

By this stage, Holden should be six miles high, had he not carelessly missed his plane. Rocking up minutes after the cut-off point, he's promptly put on standby, finally securing a berth on the same flight as me and Sefton, unfortunately surrounded by three screaming babies (and the rest of the mewling games industry). Following a bladder-testing hour spent on the runway, we're finally under way, the mammoth flight passing by in a punishing cycle of drinking and hangovers punctuated by a four-hour session of *Football Manager* on the laptop.

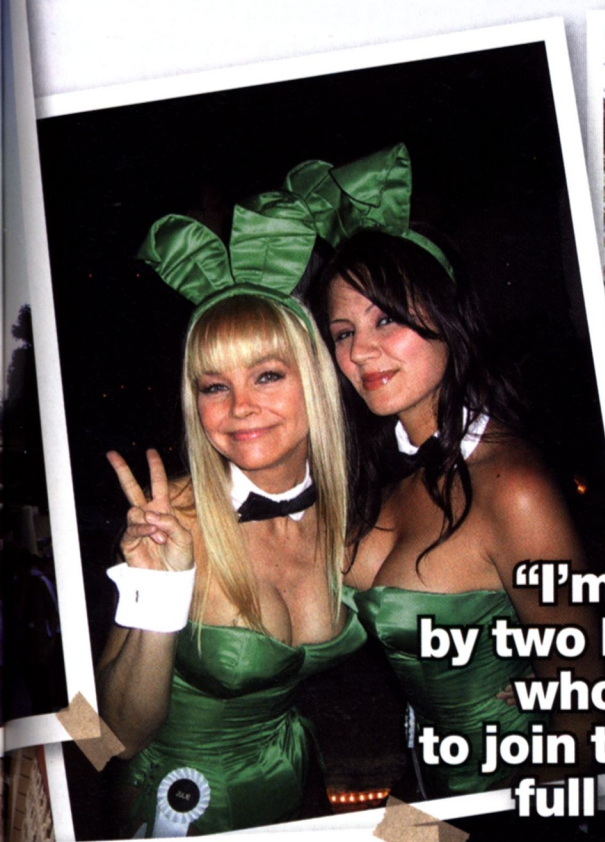
Hitting LA on Saturday night, your *ZONE* representatives scatter: Holden to his downtown hovel, Sefton to legendary '70s hangout The Hyatt and me to my suite in the painfully trendy Mondrian. There's scarcely time to breach the Pringles though, as within the hour I'm in The Roxy watching veteran Leeds band The Wedding Present, a rare opportunity to stand at the front row of a gig and enjoy waitress service.

A predictably big night out follows on Sunset Strip, with the great and the good of the games industry joining the vast majority of wankers in pissing it up the wall in spectacular fashion. Finally collapsing at about 4am (midday UK time), eight hours later I'm driving south on Interstate 5 for a secret mission involving light aircraft, Arnold Schwarzenegger's house, Mexican lager and a sick bag (read all about it in next month's Reality Check, possibly the most dangerous yet).

I DON'T LIKE MONDAYS

An overcast Monday morning signals the beginning of the graft in earnest, starting with a two-hour corporate lunch. Making my excuses, I head down Sunset Strip for the dual shopping delights of Tower Records and the Hustler Store. Skulking back to the hotel with my quarry, I'm kidnapped by two PR women who force me to eat an Oreo Cookies milkshake at Mel's Drive-In and then join them in a full manicure and pedicure.

It's an interesting experience, and one that sees me (or at least my nails) looking



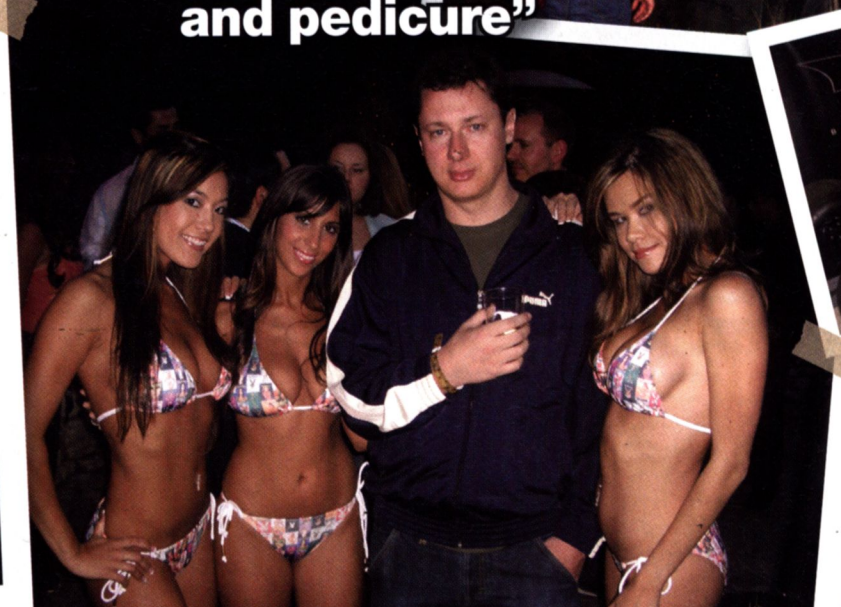






"I'm kidnapped by two PR women who force me to join them in a full manicure and pedicure"











wolfing down canapés.

If it's Tuesday, it must be the Playboy Mansion. Following last year's almost feral levels of anticipation, second time around it's an almost blasé approach, involving little more than sticking on a pair of trainers and getting on the bus. Except for Playboy virgin Holden, whose attempt to pass himself off as someone else is met with dead-eyed indifference by the drone in charge. In solidarity, me and Sefton wait with him for at least five minutes, before leaving him crying in a lay-by.

One visit to the mansion is a novelty, two is arguably tragic, but we numb the pain with free champagne as an array of scantily clad models brush against us. Lapsing into moroseness, suddenly Holden appears from the crowd, having successfully bypassed security. Spirits are lifted, and we take him on a tour of the grounds, initiating him into the *PC ZONE* Playboy Pissing Club as he merrily hoses down one of Hugh Hefner's trees. The obligatory monkey cage visit follows, with one of the inhabitants treating us to a special show whereby in a staggering blur of wrist action, he openly masturbates. Time to go...

"We numb the pain with free champagne as an array of scantily clad models brush against us"

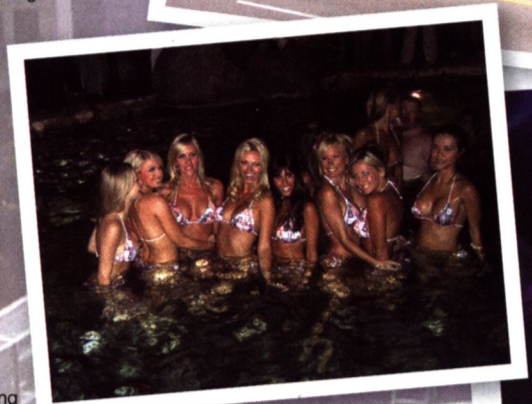


BIG HANDS

And so to the show. Or at least it would be had a power cut not caused registration tailbacks in the vicinity of three hours. Thankfully I avoid this by turning up three hours late, but it's still a horrific experience, buffeted by big boys, hugging the walls, gripped by the fear, bucking at blood-drenched zombies (or at least humans in convincing make-up).

Sweating like a beast in heat, I make my first appointment – with Take 2 – in the nick of time, only to find no sign of the PR man. *Prey* may have been ten years in the making, but it's going to have to wait. Following a token look around the show, I give it up as a bad idea and decide to try harder tomorrow, writing off day one as a dress rehearsal.

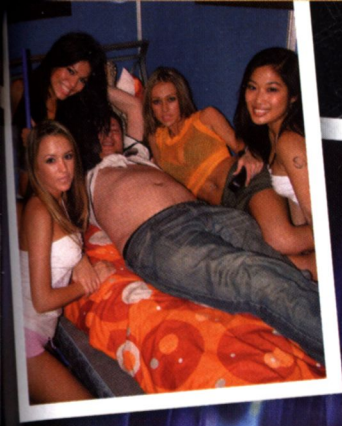
my best for the evening's Microsoft event. Following the protracted unveiling of Sony's fake PS3 footage in the afternoon, the schedule is in chaos, with thousands wrestling to get into the Shrine Auditorium, former home of the Oscars. I'm fast-tracked to the front, and take my seat to the sound of whooping and hollering for the unveiling of the Xbox 360 and accompanying games, many of which – allegedly including Epic's stunning *Gears Of War* – are coming to PC.





ROCK 'N' ROLL, BABY

The ensuing party is equally chaotic, with burly Americans practically eating each other in the battle for hotdogs and cake. Entertainment-wise it's a stellar line-up, kicking off with indie darlings The Killers. Despite the corporate setting, they perform a storming set, with front row access little more than a case of elbowing a few geeks out of the way. The gig is only marginally ruined by some flunky from Eidos claiming that I'd led to the downfall of the company with my *Championship Manager 5* review, and that printing screenshots of crashes was a despicable thing to do (unlike releasing a half-finished game, of course). With only a hardcore in attendance, the party climaxes with a proper sweaty showing from The Chemical Brothers, reminiscent of an old school club night, albeit in the company of German games journalists



Day two kicks off with a decent lunch, then a glance at my schedule reveals a surprise appointment to see an expansion pack for a game I've never heard of. I presumably agreed to it as a joke, something that's about to backfire spectacularly as I'm introduced to the burly executive producer, who grabs my hand and announces in a deep voice: "Hi, I'm Candace."

She may be Candace now, but I'll warrant she wasn't born Candace, judging by the shovel-like hands (with pink nail varnish), Adam's apple and apologetic pair of tits. Suffice to say it's a difficult 15 minutes, the only compensation being that the ensuing hysterics banish my headache for the first time in six days.

Still reeling from the experience, it's almost a non-event when on a visit to the *Singles 2: Triple Trouble* stand, I'm stripped by five models – including Angelica Bridges from *Baywatch* – tied to a bed and roundly whipped in front of a hundred-strong crowd. An interesting day, I waste little time in cracking out a cold beer back at the hotel.

MAKE IT STOP

Day three dawns in pain, and I just can't do it any more, burying my head under the pillow and basking in the hospital-like sanctuary of my all-white suite. Sefton and Holden are still hard at work at the coal face, and the phone calls and text messages are often and frantic, but I'm not for moving. The thought of sweltering heat and *Warcraft*-clad Americans proves more powerful than any financial incentive.

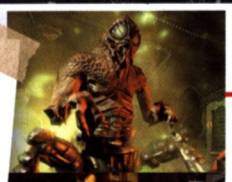


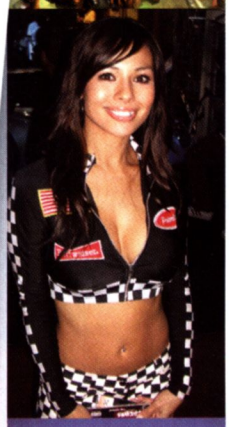
BIG CUP

Besides, I need my rest as it's the FA Cup final in the morning, kicking off at an inconvenient 7am. As usual there's idle talk of all-nighters, but in the event alarms are set and promises are made. Sefton pulls out at 6:30, leaving me fruitlessly searching the Internet for commentary. At half-time a wave of football panic kicks in, and I pull on my pants and jump in a cab, paying a Russian $50 to drive me to the Cock 'n' Bull in Santa Monica for the last 20 minutes of the game, plus – thankfully – extra time and penalties. Despite weeks of bragging, there's only one recognisable representative of the games industry present, the rest of the heaving crowd made up of ex-pats and tourists in nylon shirts.

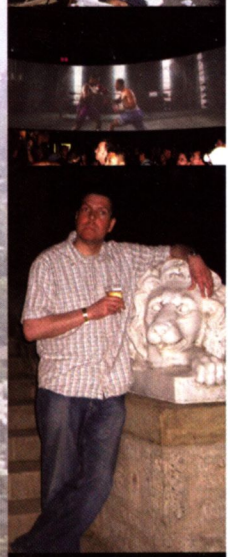
Spat out into the searing morning sunshine, I tread the streets – a sprawling mass of fast food joints, part *GTA*, part Tarantino – muttering to myself in now time-honoured fashion. Seven days has taken its toll, and I'm scarcely distinguishable from the crazies that call this home. Reaching the ocean, quiet contemplation ensues, before I take a stinking $1.25 bus back to the hotel, and see out the final day being served cocktails by models in sarongs. Shit business. PCZ

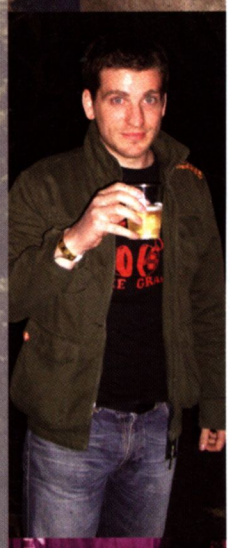














E3 Awards

GAMES OF THE SHOW
Prey, *Alan Wake*, *UT2007*, *Quake 4*, *Elder Scrolls: Oblivion*, *Call Of Duty 2*, *F.E.A.R.*

BIGGEST DICK
The web 'journalist' who spunked $800 at The Body Shop. And not on shampoo.

MOST INCONGRUOUS EXAMPLE OF DECADENCE
Pratchett having her own private stretch limousine to go shopping.



BEST BOOTH BABE
This astonishing combination (left) of teeth, tits and tan spotted parading around the Gizmondo stand.

MOST ILL-ADVISED GIFT FOR SIGNIFICANT OTHER
John Striker realistic cock and balls from the Hustler Store.

MOST OVERT DEMONSTRATION OF BRITISHNESS
Hill's bellyflop/doggy paddle combo at the Mondrian pool, to the barely concealed disgust of the surrounding beautiful people. The staff almost put a screen around him.

MOST FRUGAL EXAMPLE OF ONANISM
The PR man who spent the first night recording the hotel porn on his handheld video camera.

MOST EXTRAVAGANT E3 STAND
EA's 360-degree wrap-around screen, reportedly costing a cool $8 million.

MOST OBSCENE AB FAB MOMENT
A blonde PR bint in f**k-me shoes tottering into a stretch limo clutching three bottles of Moet.

MOST METROSEXUAL MOMENT
Hill's pre-show manicure and pedicure. Ponce.



BIGGEST PRE-SHOW RELAPSE
Hill rediscovering *Football Manager 2005* on the flight over: "Are we there? Shit."

DRINK OF THE SHOW
Water. Gallons of the stuff required to counter the heat. Closely followed by Mojitos, breakfast Bloody Marys and warm Merlot in the cab to the airport.

SONG OF THE SHOW
LA by The Fall: "Sky / Ocean / The bushes are in disagreement with the heat." Genius.

MOST DISTURBING EXAMPLE OF LA ECCENTRICITY
The shiny black man jogging down Sunset Strip. Backwards. For a worrying second it seemed that time had been reversed.

BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT
Failing to meet up with our friends in the porn industry.

BEST RE-ENACTMENT OF E3 2004
Sefton and Holden pissing in the grounds of The Playboy Mansion. Again.

MOST SURPRISING PR GIFT
A DVD of *Anal Retentive 6* delivered by hand at 3am.

THE CHIP BUMGARDNER AWARD FOR BEST AMERICAN NAME
Activision's Wendy Zass.



DARK HORSE OF E3
Huxley

BIGGEST BOY
This portly chap (left) spotted wolfing down the canapés at the Playboy Mansion.

BEST GIBBERISH FROM STONED LOCAL
"This is where Jim Morrison used to party. People round here are a different kinda nice if you know what I mean."

E3 2005 PART TWO



Flank you very much...

BROTHERS IN ARMS: EARNED IN BLOOD

Done when it's done? Not this time, baby. *Anthony Holden* finds out why a four-month-old shooter deserves a full sequel

WE REALLY should have seen it coming. I mean, they did develop the most tactically astute WWII shooter on the market, so what did we expect? Randy Pitchford and his battle-worn regulars at Gearbox Software have just routed us. We thought we'd had the last word with our *Brothers In Arms* review a few issues back (Issue 153, 87%), but they just launched a blistering counter-offensive, sneaking around and jabbing a bigger, better follow-up into our hopelessly exposed flanks.

Meanwhile, our attentions were focused elsewhere, scanning the horizon for the customary holiday expansion pack. But that would have been too predictable. Instead, Gearbox has struck back with a fully-fledged sequel called *Earned In Blood*, which not only promises a lavish array of new single and multiplayer missions, but directly counters each and every criticism we fired at the first game. Now we know how Jerry must have felt on that fateful day in June of '44...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Gearbox Software
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE www.brothersinarmsgame.com
ETA Christmas

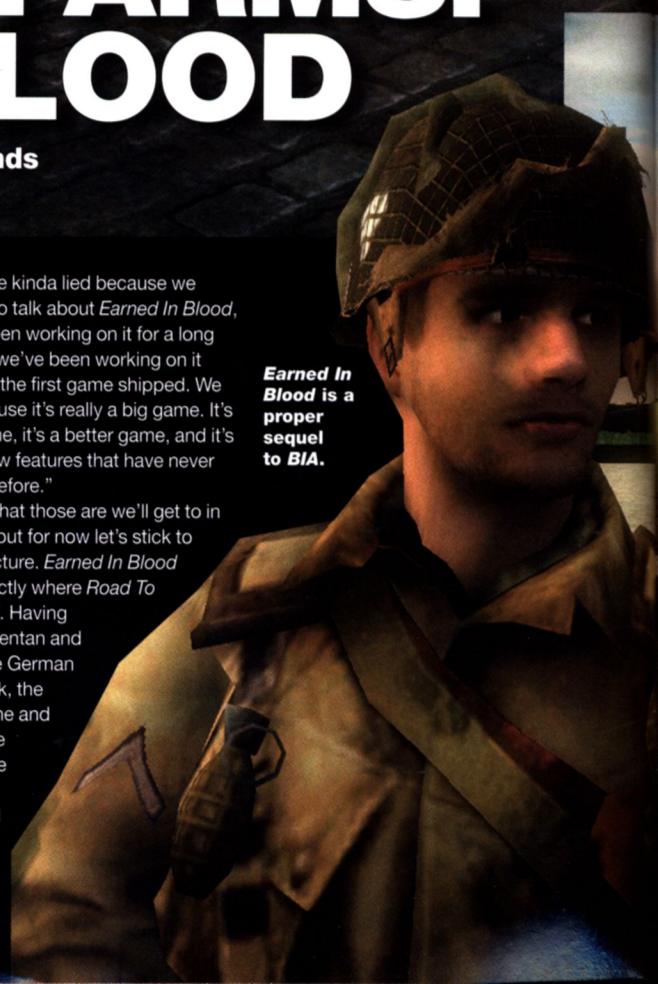
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Full sequel to the cracking WWII shooter
- Bigger and better than the first game
- All-new dynamic enemy AI
- Separate co-operative multiplayer missions

THE BIG PUSH

Of course, it's great news really. We thoroughly enjoyed the first *Brothers In Arms*, and actually said in our review that we'd love to see a follow-up that tidies up some of the shortcomings of the first game. We just didn't expect it so damn soon. As Gearbox chief Randy Pitchford explains: "We kinda lied because we didn't want to talk about *Earned In Blood*, but we've been working on it for a long time. In fact we've been working on it since before the first game shipped. We had to, because it's really a big game. It's a bigger game, it's a better game, and it's got some new features that have never been done before."

Exactly what those are we'll get to in due course, but for now let's stick to the broad picture. *Earned In Blood* picks up exactly where *Road To Hill 30* left off. Having liberated Carentan and fought off the German counterattack, the 101st Airborne and the rest of the invasion force now have to push forward and pinch



***Earned In Blood* is a proper sequel to *BIA*.**



"Huh? You've been into Farmer Maggot's crops!"



"I have feelings for you too, but this is not a good time, soldier.



"I'm not sharing my tent with you."



Utah Beach after the battle.

CV

gearbox software

GEARBOX SOFTWARE

Formed in 1999 in the spiritual home of the FPS (Dallas, Texas), Gearbox is best known for its long partnership with Valve Software. In its early years, the company put in some good work on *Counter-Strike*, as well as knocking out *Half-Life* expansions *Opposing Force* and *Blue Shift*. Some top-notch *Tony Hawk* conversions followed, as well as the enhanced PC version of *Halo*, a golden run marred only by 2002's dubious Bond 'em up *007: NightFire*.

However, it was the recent *Brothers In Arms* that marked Gearbox's true coming of age, being its first original title and the beginning of a profitable WWII franchise.

off the whole Cherbourg peninsula. This time, instead of Sgt Matt Baker (the unwilling hero of the first game), you take the role of Joe 'Red' Hartsock, formerly Baker's fire team leader but now a sergeant in his own right. "When it came to making the new game," says Pitchford, "we thought, what if we could be Hartsock? He's cool, he's gung-ho, he's got a lot of ambition, plus there's always been this tension between him and Baker. So let's become Hartsock, let's take this character to the next level and see this tension from a different perspective."

STREET FIGHTER

Like the first game, *Earned In Blood* will be split into 20 chapters. The difference is, each chapter is about 50 per cent larger than before, with broader battlefields and many more combat encounters. The emphasis will be much more on urban warfare, leaving the classic Normandy hedgerows behind and taking the action to the streets.

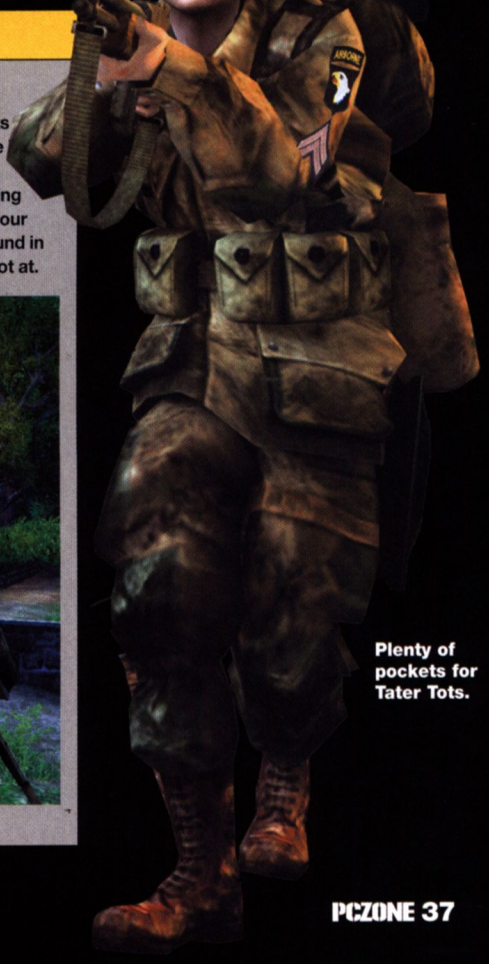
"The emphasis will be much more on urban warfare, leaving the classic Normandy hedgerows behind and taking the action to the streets"

"It's all about liberating the towns," says Pitchford. "It's street-to-street combat, house to house, town to town, with the bombed-out shells of buildings all around. It's a very different look and feel."

City fighting also comes with its own set of tactics. Gaining the high ground will be key, as will flushing enemies out of buildings with grenades and avoiding







Plenty of pockets for Tater Tots.

SHELLSHOCK

WHEN YOU'RE ALMOST BLOWN UP, BUT NOT QUITE

One small but cool new tweak to the game is in the area of concussion effects you're near an explosion. Depending on how close you are and the size of the you'll now suffer a range of effects including blurred vision, ringing ears, loss of hearing and loss of co-ordination. In the most severe cases – say if a building explodes right under you – you'll actually be knocked off your feet and drop your weapon, forcing you to get up (after a brief incapacitation) and scramble around in the dust for your gun. Which can be most inconvenient when you're being shot at.



Paratroopers landing at midnight before D-Day.

ambush in the narrow urban byways. It's a whole new game of dice.

By far the biggest transformation, however, is the nature of the enemy you'll be facing. Where the enemies of the first game were predictable, scripted and just begging to be outflanked, the opponents in *Earned In Blood* now have minds and manoeuvres of their own, and they know all your favourite moves.

"In *Road To Hill 30*," says Pitchford, "we took a lot of risks with squad combat, but we relied upon what we called situational AI for the enemies, where the designers had to set it all up. For *Earned In Blood*, we've got a dynamic system where the Germans react using their own logic. Now, the enemy actually manoeuvres on you, uses tactics against you, will hunt you down and kill you."

Anyone who's played the first game will realise the importance of this. As good as the 'find, fix and flank' system was, the encounters in *Road To Hill 30* were very one-sided, with the hapless Germans falling for the same schoolboy tactics every time. Giving them the same options as you, and the awareness to put them into effect means we should see a much more fluid, unpredictable battlefield.

To demonstrate this, Pitchford loads up a typical-looking encounter from the new game, with two German squads facing Pitchford's boys across a low-walled, squarish patch of turf. "Watch this. I'm going to make a mistake on purpose. I'm going to tell both my units to fire on this group of enemies here, and totally ignore this group over here. And I'm going to try and flank them myself from this direction." So saying, Pitchford leaves his teams behind and hunches his way around the corner to his right. Spotting his ruse quickly, the ignored German unit reacts by moving to the left on the other side of the square. "Look – they're manoeuvring. They're flanking me in the other direction. I'm going to get my Assault team out of there, and there you go, they flanked me – they just killed my entire fire team." Clearly pleased with himself, Randy turns the whole battlefield around 180 degrees, manoeuvring his one remaining team around the square way until the Germans are on the opposite side. "See, totally dynamic."



Eisenhower congratulates the troops in-game and in reality.



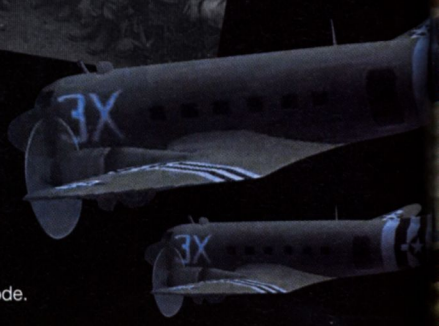


The Breakfast Run: 1942

The new AI smarts also call for a different approach to level design. Without the luxury of being able to pin the Nazis down to specific, dug-in positions, the levels have become more open and unimpeded. Choke points can now be approached from several different directions, meaning confrontations will play out very differently depending on the route you take. All things considered, you better hope they don't spot you first.

GO TEAM

Clearly, the single-player game has pushed ahead into some exciting new territory. The gameplay promises to be far more lively and unpredictable than the first outing, bringing the series that much closer to its famous claims of authenticity. As you'd expect, the multiplayer side is also getting a spit-shine, but as well as enhancing the existing, competitive multiplayer mode with ten new missions and tweaked gameplay, Gearbox is developing that rarest of things, a two-player co-op mode.



STRAIGHT TO THE SOURCE

GEARBOX GETS BEHIND THE *BIA* MODDING SCENE

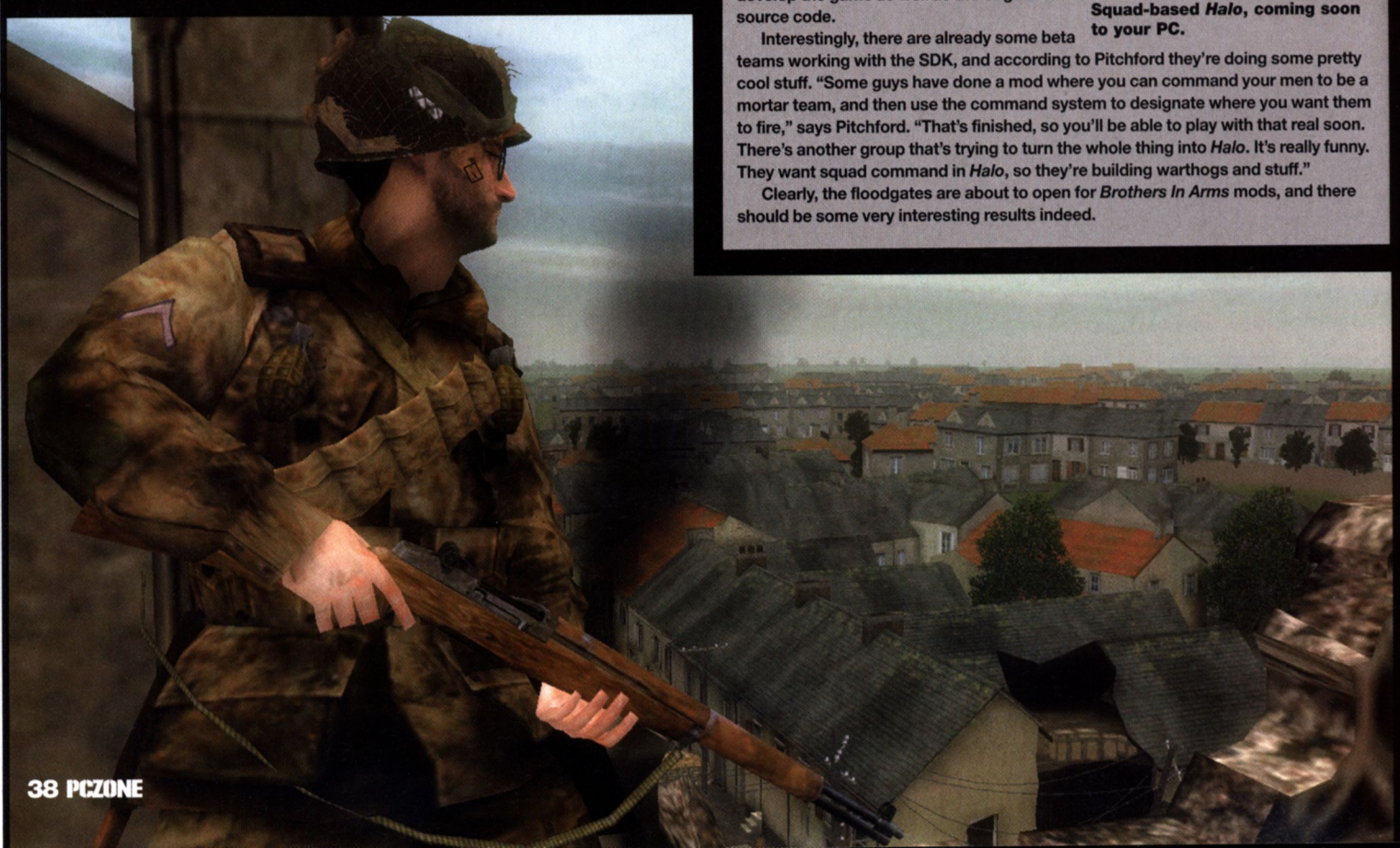
It's common practice for developers to release editing tools for their games these days, but Gearbox is getting around to it quicker than most. A public beta of the *Brothers In Arms* SDK is promised by the time you read this, with the finished version to ship with *Earned In Blood*. It's a generous package too, with the full set of tools used to develop the game as well as the original source code.



Squad-based *Halo*, coming soon to your PC.

Interestingly, there are already some beta teams working with the SDK, and according to Pitchford they're doing some pretty cool stuff. "Some guys have done a mod where you can command your men to be a mortar team, and then use the command system to designate where you want them to fire," says Pitchford. "That's finished, so you'll be able to play with that real soon. There's another group that's trying to turn the whole thing into *Halo*. It's really funny. They want squad command in *Halo*, so they're building warthogs and stuff."

Clearly, the floodgates are about to open for *Brothers In Arms* mods, and there should be some very interesting results indeed.





Soldiers: always grumpy.

"We shall fight them on the beaches. Again and again."

"With ten new missions and tweaked gameplay, Gearbox is developing that rarest of things, a two-player co-op mode"



Stare Fritz in the eye and give him a biff for Blighty. Or, um... Uncle Sam.

GUN CRAZY

A COUPLE OF NEW WEAPONS REVEALED, IF THAT SORT OF THING TURNS YOU ON

It's always tricky to bring new weapons into a WWII series, given that you can only work within the realms of reality, but *Earned In Blood* nonetheless manages to produce a few new toys to keep the gun nuts happy. On the German side you get the FG42, a versatile scoped rifle carried by the Fallschirmjäger or German paratroopers. For the Yanks, you get the M3 'grease gun', a compact, rapid-fire SMG you might remember from *Call Of Duty*. "The M3 is a tanker weapon," says Randy Pitchford, "but as the war progressed the paratroopers got their hands on some of these things. Now that we're going beyond Hill 30 we can plausibly introduce these new weapons."



To us, the thing at the bottom of the screen is just a stick to kill Nazis with.

You can never carry enough rope, y'know.

The way it works is this: one player is Matt Baker, hero of *Hill 30*, and the other is Red Hartsock, new boy in town. Together they fight Nazis, each taking control of one squad of paratroopers. There's also another, completely separate set of German missions where you get to play the other side for a change.

As with *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*, the co-op mode required its own set of custom missions to make it work, though in this case there's no homoerotic grappling involved. Says Randy: "As far as I know we're the first WWII game ever to have a co-op feature, and that's really exciting, because this game is about brotherhood. It's all about soldiers fighting together."

Cunningly, the ten co-operative environments can each be played in a variety of ways to extend their longevity. The one we had a crack at was a bunker-style affair, in which you have to breach some enemy defences before blowing up an anti-aircraft battery. In the default mode, it's a straightforward objective-based mission, but you can also play it as a defend-the-hill style game, a time trial or a variety of other skill-based challenges. As Pitchford says: "It's different if you're attacking the bunker from if you're *in* the bunker."

While it's too early to pass judgement, the co-operative game seems a worthwhile addition to the series – our only complaint being that when you die, you have to sit around while your mate carries on. You either twiddle your thumbs until he dies, or you reset the mission. "It's tough, huh?" says Pitchford. "But we wanted that, we wanted a different kind of feeling in co-op. The other multiplayer mode is more about competition and fun – this is all about teamwork, and there's a certain tension that comes when there's no magic there. The idea, especially in the Tour Of Duty mode, is to see how many missions you can beat together without dying. If you can do 53 missions together, you're jammin'. And we're going to count that online so you can see who's gotten the farthest."

It seems like a reasonable idea. We would have preferred the option of playing through the single-player storyline in co-op, but it's certainly not a bad compromise. It also proves Gearbox isn't just cashing in with a weak follow-up too soon after the original game. There's real substance here, a lot more than in *Road To Hill 30*, and it's looking more and more like that game was just a warm-up. PCZ

E3 2005 PART TWO

Infernal affairs...

ON THE DVD

HELLGATE: LONDON

Loosen your collars, folks... *Sam Kieldsen's* getting hot in here



Just another Monday morning on Oxford Street.

HELL ON EARTH, you say? Lost souls, shambling empty-eyed along streets and alleyways, incoherent moans escaping their rotten maws, pausing occasionally to unleash vile streams of strangely-coloured fluids? Anyone who's ever frequented our fair capital's Elephant and Castle and its environs, will know that such a concept is not too far removed from reality (and your correspondent ventured into that godforsaken place three times a week for three years – thank you, the university clearing system). So Flagship Studios' decision to set its debut title in a demon-infested Laaahndon Taaahn is fitting, at least in our bleary eyes.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Flagship Studios
PUBLISHER Namco
WEBSITE www.hellgatelondon.com
ETA 2006

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Action RPG from the makers of *Diablo*
- Randomly generated levels
- Over 100 weapons available
- Set in a post-apocalyptic London

That said, Flagship has picked London mainly because of its history (and sadly not because of its less salubrious denizens). The city positively drips with it, and its age means that it's been knocked down and rebuilt more times than John Travolta's acting career. The result is an aesthetically pleasing (at least if you're a games designer) hodgepodge of architectural styles, and lots and lots of tunnels: Roman aqueducts, World War II bunkers, the charmingly rat-infested London Underground. Tunnels are important in *Hellgate: London*, because they're humanity's only remaining hiding place. From what? Well, from the legions of the damned on the rampage, that's what.



Begging on the Tube was getting more aggressive.

KNIGHTY KNIGHT

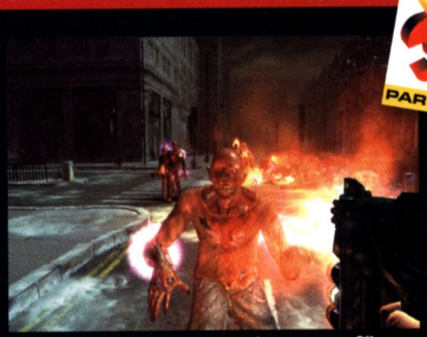
The game is set in 2032, five years after the opening of the titular portal that let millions of demons and other assorted nasties loose on the streets of the city. Slaughter and destruction on an unprecedented scale was the predictable result, with the military finding their weapons to be useless against this paranormal foe. Anyone lucky enough to survive the



HELL IS FOR HEROES

GET BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM YOUR FRIENDS...

Flagship has thus far remained relatively tight-lipped about *Hellgate: London*'s multiplayer options, probably because details are still some way from being set in stone. What we do know is that the team are currently concentrating their efforts on implementing co-operative action on a rather impressive scale.



"Got a minute to take part in a survey?"

Crews of players will roam the rubble-strewn streets and dank sewers of our beloved capital to hunt down hellspawn. Exactly how many of you will be able to team up on a single server has not yet been decided, as Flagship is still in the process of a rather delicate balancing act. It told us that there could be 30 or more players per server – as long as it's still fun to play.

Diablo and its sequel were insanely popular online games, and the Flagship boys are very keen to replicate this kind of success with *Hellgate* – don't bet against the likes of leaderboards, league ladders and other stat-tracking features making an appearance.

CV

FLAGSHIP STUDIOS

This fledgling studio was founded in 2003 by a team of ex-Blizzard North developers and executives, including former vice president Bill Roper. *Hellgate: London* is the San Francisco-based team's first title, and as you might expect from the talented folks that brought us the *Diablo* games, it's an action-oriented role-player.



onslaught quickly made their way underground, out of harm's way.

But now it's payback time. The Knights Templar and other assorted *Fortean Times* favourites (*Hellgate*'s packing more secret societies than ten copies of *The Da Vinci Code*) have known about the demonic threat for centuries – in fact they've prevented invasions several times throughout history – and now they're striking back. Their main weapon, if you haven't guessed by now, is you. Now there's a thing.

Hellgate: London is an RPG viewed from a (mainly) first-person perspective, but don't expect a *Deus Ex* or *Vampire: Bloodlines* type of experience. This is RSI-inducing, balls-to-the-walls action all the way. Think *Diablo* with 3D graphics and a non-fantasy near-future setting and you're nearly there. Seeing as many of the Flagship team actually worked on *Diablo* and its sequel, this comes as little surprise.

NO REPEATS

Like the *Diablo* games, *Hellgate* will have randomly generated levels. There are certain pre-designed 'safe areas' in the game, where you can rest up, visit the medic or do a bit of shopping, but the rest of the time you'll be duking it out with demons in randomly created parts of London. You might argue that this is an easy enough feature to stick in a 2D game, but getting it to work properly in three glorious dimensions is a staggeringly difficult task. Little wonder that Flagship has had to create its own engine to get the likes of lighting and shading right. The upshot is that no two gamers will experience the exact same *Hellgate: London*. The randomly generated monsters you kill drop randomly generated loot and items, and scripted events will be sown in at randomly generated times. Everyone will play a slightly different game.

As befits an action role-player, there'll be an abundance of weapons – at least 100 of them, in fact. But don't expect to see old favourites like AK47s and Uzis among them. Conventional weapons can't hurt demonic creatures, so all the toys in your potential arsenal are at least slightly magical in nature. You don't spray lead from an M16 – you unleash flaming shells of righteous fury with your Vulcan Bolter. That kind of thing.



You can't accuse Flagship of being mindless games development zombies. Oh...



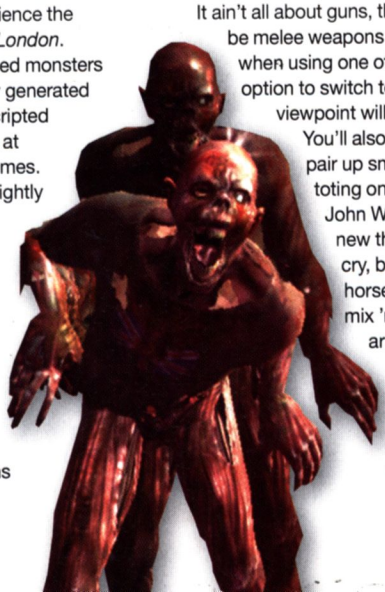
You'll spend lots of time underground.



Posh goes shopping on Bond Street.

DOUBLE TROUBLE

It ain't all about guns, though. There'll be melee weapons too, and it's when using one of these that the option to switch to a third-person viewpoint will come in useful. You'll also be allowed to pair up smaller weapons, toting one in each hand John Woo-style. Nothing new there, we hear you cry, but hold your horses: *Hellgate* lets you mix 'n' match your armaments. Fancy sticking a flamethrower in one hand and a sword in the other? You got it.



In addition to modifying your weapons and armour, you'll also be able to customise your character by increasing his or her stats as you gain experience, choosing where to distribute points. Several character classes will be available, but at the moment we can only confirm the Templar, a heavily armoured, close-combat type of fellow who vaguely resembles a medieval knight.

Hellgate: London is already looking exceptionally promising, and with time on Flagship's side (there's no release date yet, just a suggestion that the game will be out at some point in 2006), we're expecting a thoroughly polished end product. Well, it's got to be better than a sightseeing trip up the Old Kent Road.

E3 2005 PART TWO

Behind you...

ON THE CD ON THE DVD

F.E.A.R.

Monolith's hard-hitter put in another commanding performance at E3. *Anthony Holden* tries not to wet his knickers like a girly-man



"That's it – we're never eating here again."



The HUD auto-hides nicely to leave the screen free of clutter.



Shockwaves on grenades are all the rage these days, but *F.E.A.R.* does it best.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Monolith
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE whatisfear.com
ETA September

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Spook-tastic atmosphere
- Explosive slow-motion action
- Smart, relentless AI
- High-quality script and acting

CV

MONOLITH

MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS

Based in Kirkland, Washington, first-person shooter specialist Monolith has been pumping out quality action games for over a decade. Key titles include *Blood*, *Shogo*, *No One Lives Forever 1* and *2*, *Aliens Vs Predator 2* and *Tron 2.0*. The company recently made its first foray into the MMO world with *The Matrix Online*, and is currently beavering away on *F.E.A.R.* and psychological thriller *Condemned*.

OPINIONS differ, but for me the best PC game of E3 came down to *Prey* and *F.E.A.R.* Of course, there were a lot of other great shooters there – *UT 2007*, *Call Of Duty 2* and *Quake Wars* to name but a few. But while other games might have looked better, boasted better credentials or pitched bigger battles, only two titles managed to create that special buzz that maybe we were seeing something new here, something different and exciting and with a lot more ideas than your average market-researched sequel.

With *Prey* it was the creative use of three-dimensional space that impressed. With *F.E.A.R.* it was the careful blend of tactical shooting and sphincter-tightening psychological horror, not to mention the sheer freakin' spectacle of the thing. For those who haven't played the demo yet (shame on you), this game throws out more debris, broken glass, smoke, sparks, flames, blood, guts and righteous hellfire than anything this side of Judgement Day. We're increasingly convinced that the slow-mo effect was put in just so you could moon around and admire it all.

To recap very quickly, the game puts you inside a high-tech, near-future government outfit called First Encounter Assault Recon, a covert strike team dedicated to combatting paranormal threats – a bit like Ghostbusters but with more death and dismemberment. Each member of the team has a special mental power – you're the new guy, and your power is to momentarily slow down time.

"There's a creepy little girl wandering around who appears to be able to kill people by looking at them"

At the outset of the game an unidentified paramilitary group has taken over a high-tech aerospace complex and obliterated dozens of spec ops units sent to deal with them. On top of this there's a creepy little girl wandering around who appears to be able to kill people just by looking at them.

From our E3 hands-on we were able to fill in a few more details. The unidentified force is in fact a squad of top-secret military clones, led by an insane, psychically enhanced military officer by the name of Paxton Fettel. In the intro movie Fettel is seen kneeling in a prison cell, being visited by the creepy girl. Immediately afterwards, we cut to our clones, fully armed and armoured but in some kind of 'standby' state in a military

LEAN AND MEAN

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEANING AROUND CORNERS

One of my biggest (some would say pettiest) complaints with recent blockbusters such as *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2*, has been the baffling lack of a lean function. To me, this is a feature no modern-day FPS should be without. Obviously there's the odd exception (super-fast online shooters such as *UT* for example), but for any FPS with pretensions to realism or remotely tactical action, it's just common sense.

Without leaning you're mostly reduced to running around like a headless chicken. With it, you're peeking around corners, edging around walls and calculating angles of attack – you're much more aware of your environment and much more involved in the game as a result. What's more, by enabling better use of cover it forces enemies to be that much tougher, and as such it goes hand in hand with strong AI.

The best example I can think of to illustrate this is the once-mighty *Soldier Of Fortune II*, and *F.E.A.R.* picks up right where that game left off. Powerful AI, tactical combat, impactful weapons, lots of gore – all the ingredients for a vintage, close-quarters shooter.



Go on then, stick your hand out.



A shootout, a few spooky visions, another shootout – works for us.

warehouse.

Suddenly, they jolt upright and snap into action, killing guards in a lightning attack.

Apparently, Fettel has managed to gain psychic control of the dormant clones, and on his command they take over the compound where he's imprisoned and liberate him. Soon after, Fettel pops up on a security feed, chowing down on the remains of one of the spec ops guys. Tasty.

DANGEROUS MINDS

That's your job then – eliminate crazed puppet master Paxton Fettle. What role the little girl plays we don't yet know. Is she controlling Fettle? Is she a mere phantasm, an extension of his insane psyche? Who knows.

What we do know is that the action is stunning. Not only are the pyrotechnics without compare, but the weapons are seriously meaty to boot. You've had a taste of them already in the multiplayer beta: the chunky SMG, the nailgun that pins enemies to walls, the plasma rifle that can fire through a whole phalanx of bad guys. In combination with flying scissor kicks and other melee moves, it's about the most kinetic and enjoyable first-person action there is.

It certainly gives *Half-Life 2* a run for its money, and already has one or two advantages over that game. For a start there's the AI, which has to rank among the best we've ever seen. Enemies not only work in tactical squads and understand cover, but they pursue you like no other FPS foe. In one sequence I fired off a few rounds through a window, felling one of the enemies outside before backtracking to retrieve a better weapon. I assumed the rest of the baddies would wait dutifully outside for me to return, but not so. They actually opened the door (a miracle!) and hunted me down like a dog. They're also quite fond of crawling under obstacles, jumping over tables and flushing you out of corners with grenades.

Of course, in between firefights you get the other half of *F.E.A.R.*'s magical blend – the creep-out horror moments. The E3 demo showed this off brilliantly, with Paxton and his little friend invading your mind at regular intervals before disappearing in a puff of soot. It keeps you nicely on edge, never knowing if a squad of enemies or a half-seen phantom awaits you round the next corner.

We've seen a lot more of this game now, and *F.E.A.R.* is still our tip for shooter of 2005. Watch this space for the exclusive review and playable demo in a few short months' time. PCZ





Emily can lay her hands on Jacob to boost his sanity. The harlot.



That's a nasty ulcer.

Two can play at that game...

CALL OF CTHULHU: DESTINY'S END

ON THE CD ON THE DVD

***Anthony Holden* finds a title that gives his split-personality full rein**

WHILE NOT exactly in its death throes, the survival horror game has definitely hit the skids. As good as *Resident Evil 4* may be, the whole genre simply feels spent, with tired mechanics, repetitive scenarios and dumber and dumber puzzles.

As such, one of the more pleasant surprises of E3 was this new spook 'em up from Headfirst Productions, the same folks who are bringing you the FPS-styled *Call Of Cthulhu: Dark Corners Of The Earth*. The two games are definitely not to be confused, however. Where *Dark Corners* is long delayed and increasingly unlikely to set the world on fire, *Destiny's End* is a fresh proposition with a central premise that could rejuvenate the whole survival horror concept.

"To put it simply, we're taking the survival horror genre and the *Resident Evil 4* style and making it co-operative with two characters," says artist/designer Andrew Brazier. "You can switch between them at any time, and the AI takes control of the other character. Alternatively, you can get a friend to jump in and control the second character and play as a team, either split-screen, online or on LAN."

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Headfirst Productions
PUBLISHER Hip Games
WEBSITE www.hip-europe.com
ETA Spring 2006

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Survival horror in the twisted world of HP Lovecraft
- Control two characters in single-player
- Play two-player co-op online or on LAN
- Better breed of puzzles thanks to the co-operative gameplay

The characters in question are Jacob Armitage and Emily Carter. Jacob is your classic Lovecraftian tortured soul, disturbed by nightmares, visions and voices in his head. Emily is an academic who's studied the Cthulhu Mythos, and thinks she can help Jacob by taking him to the source of his problems – the cursed fishing village of Innsmouth.

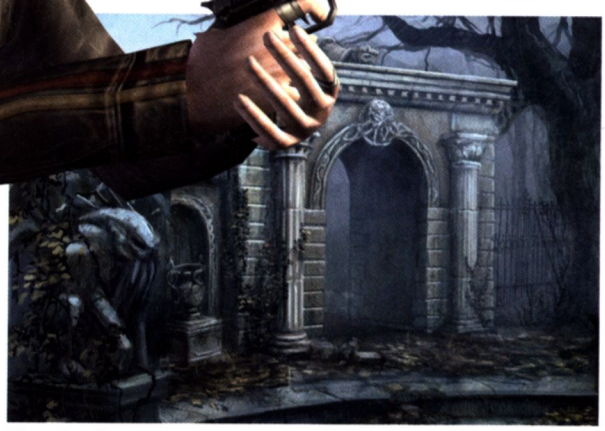
FALLING IN LOVECRAFT

As you'd expect, each has their strengths and weaknesses. Jacob is physically strong and good with weapons, his arsenal encompassing the traditional iron bar, revolver, shotgun, etc. Emily is more the athletic, agile type, able to balance on ledges and crawl into small spaces. Later in the game she also uses her Mythos knowledge to develop magic abilities, such as occult chants and defensive spells.

In a nod to the PlayStation 2 classic *Ico*, the two characters very much depend on each other for survival. "Jacob needs Emily to be near him to remain stable," says Andrew. "If he's separated from her he begins to lose his sanity, because he can't cope with his demons. So when you separate them you effectively have a time limit. If Jacob's sanity goes down to zero he kills himself."

The concept of sanity is similar in some ways to Headfirst's other *Cthulhu* game, but here it's worked in the central game mechanic in a very clever fashion. All the puzzles hinge on the idea of co-operation and the need to stay together. In one sequence, for example, Emily and Jacob are faced with an electrified fence. After a bit of exploration, it seems Emily can fit through a small gap that leads to the generator, which she can switch off before rushing back to make sure Jacob doesn't top himself. With the fence now safely neutralised, the duo can perform a *Splinter Cell*-esque boost to bunk Emily over the top, leaving Jacob once again stranded. You can see how it starts to work.

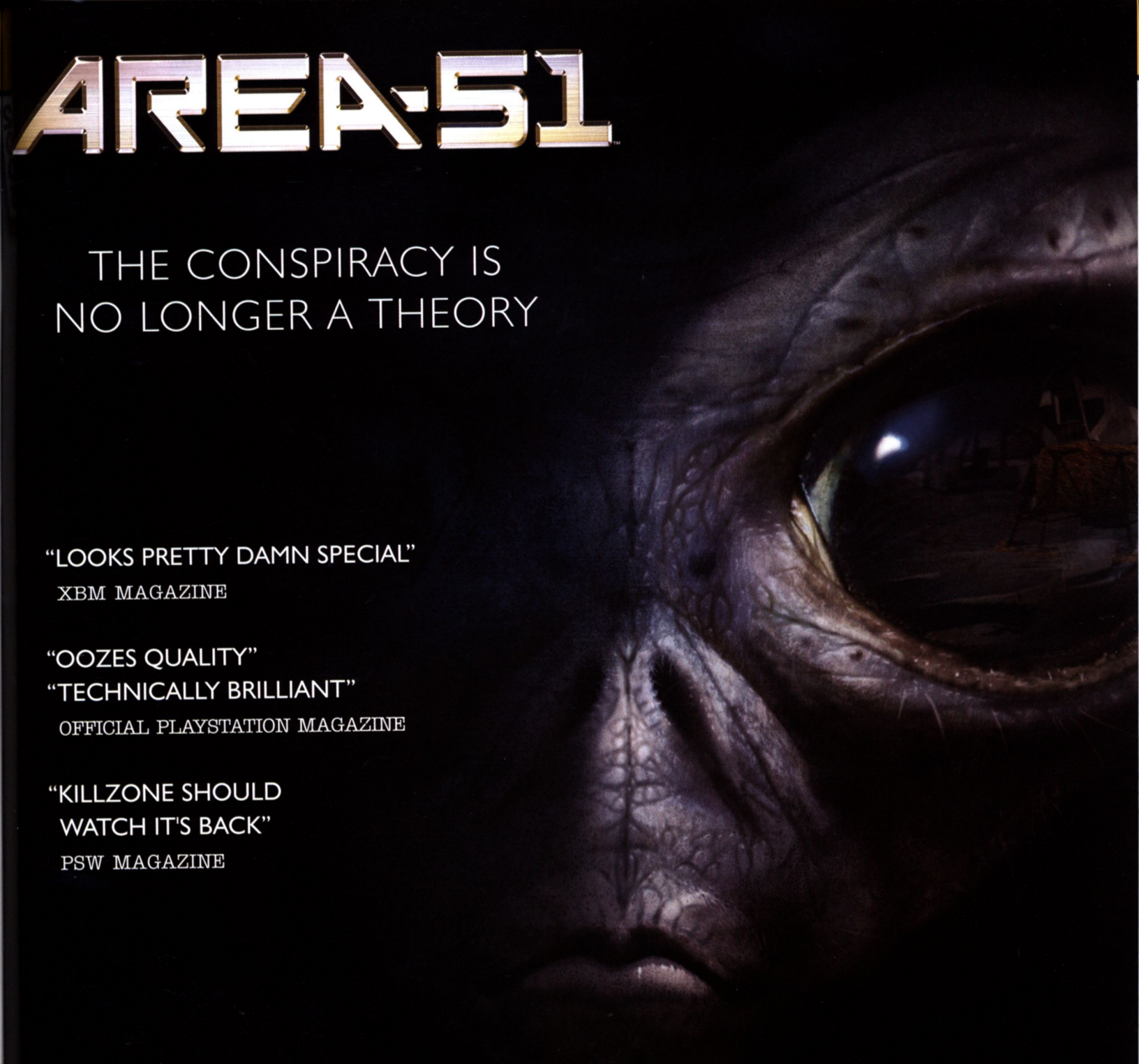
Clearly, the two-character premise has loads of potential. Whether with one or two players, the team idea allows for a whole new paradigm for puzzles and gameplay. And if the story is up to snuff, the relationship between the characters and the need to look after them should also mean you actually give a toss if they live or die. Which might be a breakthrough in itself. PCZ



The storyline was penned by Steve Ince of *Broken Sword* fame.

AREA-51

THE CONSPIRACY IS
NO LONGER A THEORY



"LOOKS PRETTY DAMN SPECIAL"
XBM MAGAZINE

"OOZES QUALITY"
"TECHNICALLY BRILLIANT"
OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE

"KILLZONE SHOULD
WATCH IT'S BACK"
PSW MAGAZINE



BATTLE AN ENEMY UNLIKE ANYTHING YOU'VE EVER FACED.

MUTATE AND EXPERIENCE AMAZING ALIEN ABILITIES.

INTENSIFY THE ACTION WITH ONLINE MULTIPLAYER COMBAT.

BT

15 XBOX XBOX LIVE PC CD PlayStation 2 MIDWAY POWERED BY gamespy

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E3 2005 PART TWO



"Yo, check it. I'm your main man and welcome to MTV's *Crypts*."



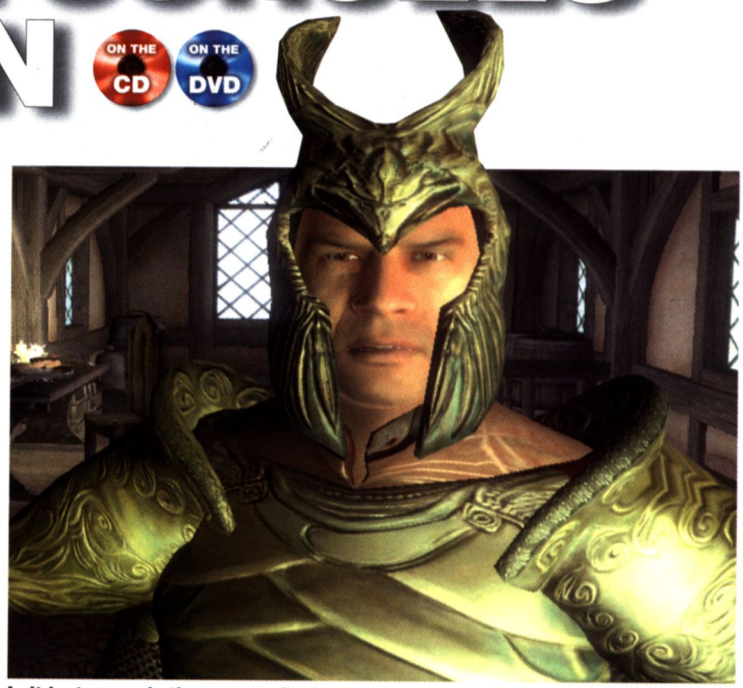
The Evergreen Forest. Peaceful until Bert Raccoon wakes up...

Going underground...

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

ON THE CD ON THE DVD

The gates of hell have been opened. *Jamie Sefton* squeezes into his asbestos Y-fronts



Is it just us, or is there a touch of Portillo in this chap?

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Bethesda Softworks
PUBLISHER Take 2
WEBSITE www.elderscrolls.com
ETA Christmas

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Sequel to the fantastic *Morrowind*
- Astonishing next-gen graphics
- Over 200 dungeons
- Revamped combat and spell system
- Thousands of intelligent NPCs to interact with

CV

Bethesda SOFTWORKS

BETHESDA SOFTWORKS

Maryland-based Bethesda Softworks began back in 1988 with Wayne Gretzky Hockey, but has since made a name for itself with The *Elder Scrolls* series of role-playing games. The company recently bought the rights to *Fallout 3* too...

2002 *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* – a vast RPG that garnered a legion of loyal fans. The ability to choose not to get involved with the main adventure and instead potter about with the side-quests was a major revelation. An expansion pack *Tribunal* followed shortly afterwards.

2003 *Bloodmoon* was the second expansion pack and received another *PC ZONE* Essential Award and 85 per cent score.

IN YE OLDEN days, role-playing games were little more than just text adventures. Type 'E' to go east, and you might be greeted by the phrase: "You are in a beautiful forest. Sunlight streams through the lush canopy, reflecting dappled sunlight on the grass and flowers below." Twenty-five years on, my character is heading east, and now there really is a beautiful forest in front of my eyes, completely rendered in incredible 3D graphics, branches swaying and reacting to the real-time weather system, birds and wildlife frolicking in the idyllic countryside.

This is *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* – the new RPG from developer Bethesda, and sequel to the critically acclaimed *Morrowind*, subject of last month's Games That Changed The World. *Oblivion* is set in a different part of the *Elder Scrolls* universe, Tamriel, where the emperor has been killed and an evil portal has been opened up below the Imperial capital, letting in all kinds of demonic nasties. It's up to you to vanquish the hellish beasts, rescue the emperor's surviving son and save the world from, ahem, oblivion.

THE PRISONER

Of course, this being an *Elder Scrolls* game, it's up to you how you complete the task and what character you wish to become, be that warrior, mage, thief or anyone in between. *Oblivion* begins in jail, where as a nameless prisoner, you must first free yourself to begin the quest – that's if you can stop admiring the gob-smacking next-gen graphics. And now that *Oblivion* has a complex physics system, over 9,000 objects can be interacted with – if your character happens to brush past some manacles on the wall, they'll move and clank realistically.

Eventually you escape and can enjoy the rest of the province, approximately 16 square miles, with half of it consisting of forest. Bethesda apparently spent research time with the University of Maryland geology lab studying how soil erodes, rock forms and trees develop. The woods and forests you now see in the game weren't created by an artist, they were literally grown by the game, giving it an intense, organic feel and making it a unique place for unscripted events to happen. You can shoot wild deer that wander about, and eat the meat to boost your stats, or pick berries and mushrooms and even combine them to create potions – if you have the required alchemy skills. In addition, a compass at the bottom of the screen always points towards the nearest point of interest, such as a





Not all monsters are big and scary. Some are small and rubbish.



Heads on spikes, something we like to see.



Evil messes things up again.



Flesh decays. Nutty designer undead toys, however, do not.

dungeon, so that you don't end up wandering about lost for hours.

DUNGEON MASTER

Oblivion has over 200 handcrafted dungeons that the team has spent a lot of time creating, ensuring that there is minute-to-minute action with more quests and interactive items, enemies to defeat and other surprises, such as traps. Combat is still immensely important, but has been revamped so that you can now easily combine melee, defence and magic. By pressing the attack button you pull off a quick sword attack, whereas holding the attack button will perform a much more powerful swipe at foes. You can add magical spells to any fights you encounter, as well as numerous blocks and combos – all governed by character statistics that affect the kind of moves you can pull off and how successful they are.

We've already seen exciting battles in elven dungeons against skeletal warriors, zombies, goblins and hellish knights, with the combat feeling much more brutal and realistic than *Morrowind*, metal clashing viciously against metal, anguished screams echoing through dark halls and blood spilling freely. You also have the use of other weapons, such as arrows, that will stick realistically in wood or flesh, or bounce off stone.

However, another weapon you can use in the dungeons is stealth – creep into the shadows and your aiming reticule becomes an eye, indicating that you're hidden from view. Now you can sneak up behind enemies and give them a well-timed smack on the back of the head with the butt of your bow, or perform other stealth kills. If you need to check how your character is progressing, bringing up the journal screen will display everything you need to know. Bethesda has decided not to include experience points as in a traditional RPG however, with your character constantly improving different skills the more you play.

IT'S GOOD TO TALK

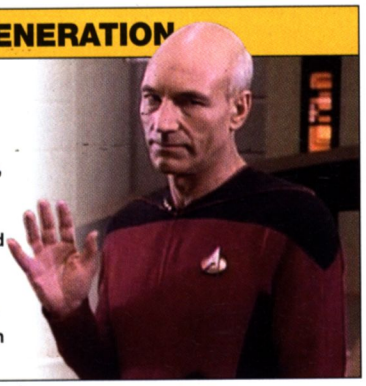
A major criticism of *Morrowind* was the lack of truly interactive NPCs, but this looks to have been improved drastically with Bethesda's new 'radiant AI' system. Basically, non-player characters now have full day/night schedules, general goals and personalities. They'll engage in non-scripted conversations with each other pulled from data in the world, and will react to you differently, depending on your character and previous actions. You can have conversations with NPCs, or just eavesdrop on them to discover new side-quests and find out valuable information. The new 'persuasion area' allows you to give your replies some attitude, so you can bully them, for example, or tell a joke – the one about the goblin and the farmer's daughter is always a winner. You can tell by the superb facial animation and tone of their voice if you've managed to win them over – or become the social equivalent of an income tax inspector.

With a total of nine main cities, dozens of settlements, gorgeous forests, huge dungeons (including the yet-to-be-revealed hellish underground levels) and a population of thousands of NPCs to interact with, *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* is definitely one of the most eagerly awaited role-playing games of the year. Don't miss next month's *PC ZONE* when we'll bring you an exclusive in-depth preview, with unmissable info and never-seen-before screenshots. PCZ

VOICES – THE NEXT GENERATION

OBLIVION PROMISES "AMAZING CAST TALENT" FOR THE NPCS

You may recognise the dulcet tones of the emperor when you first play *Oblivion* – yes, it's *Star Trek*'s Mr Picard, the very bald Patrick Stewart, who has signed up with other yet-to-be-revealed big names to lend the game their acting talents. *Oblivion* apparently features over 50 hours of recorded dialogue – all with lip-synching – that will take up half the available space on the game's DVD.



E3 2005 PART TWO



Not exactly the Ritz-Carlton.



A welcome return...

X3: REUNION

Often found creating his own gaseous nebulae, *Paul Presley* gets lost in space

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Egosoft Studios
PUBLISHER Deep Silver
WEBSITE www.x3reunion.com
ETA September 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Next-generation engine for the popular space exploration franchise
- Professional scriptwriter on board to handle storyline duties
- Freeform universe
- Developer actually listens to community feedback and collaborates on design



IN A SHOW packed with glitz, glamour, glitter and girls in various states of undress, it was reassuringly gratifying to witness the sight of the industry's various boozers, cruisers and Jacuzzi users having their attentions captivated by a rolling demo of space stations, alien ships and colourful space battles as they walked past the *X3* booth.

Our own presentation of the game that was once set to be little more than an expansion pack for *X2* (but thanks to an ever-burgeoning design document and a completely new graphics engine has been promoted to a fully-fledged sequel) was equally as captivating, but for other reasons. Namely, we were allowed to sit down and actually play the thing for ourselves. Yes, we got to actually try out the new flight controls, explore the new menu systems and marvel at the new bump-mapping and pixel-shading malarkey. We almost missed several subsequent meetings as a result.



"There must be a better parking spot around here somewhere."

PATENT PENDING

So, what did we learn (other than to carry better diaries, and keep them properly up to date)? First of all, the movement system gives a huge amount of control back to the player that was missing before. In *X2* there were strafe controls, certainly, but they were hidden away and were nowhere near as versatile as this. For *X3* they've been made far more integral to the experience. Now ships have that much sought-after *Babylon 5* realistic feel, able to spin, strafe and travel on the z-axis with ease while still accelerating along their forward path. Inertia I think they call it, but then I'm not a physicist with a degree in astroscience, so I'll just



One of these ships is not like the others.

CV EGOSOFT

EGOSOFT STUDIOS

Unlike many developers, Egosoft knows what it's good at (namely, hugely complex, highly detailed, impressively realised universe simulators), and sticks to it. Suffice to say we won't be seeing an 'X3: Super Go-Kart Racing' spin-off any time soon, and the world is a better place for it.

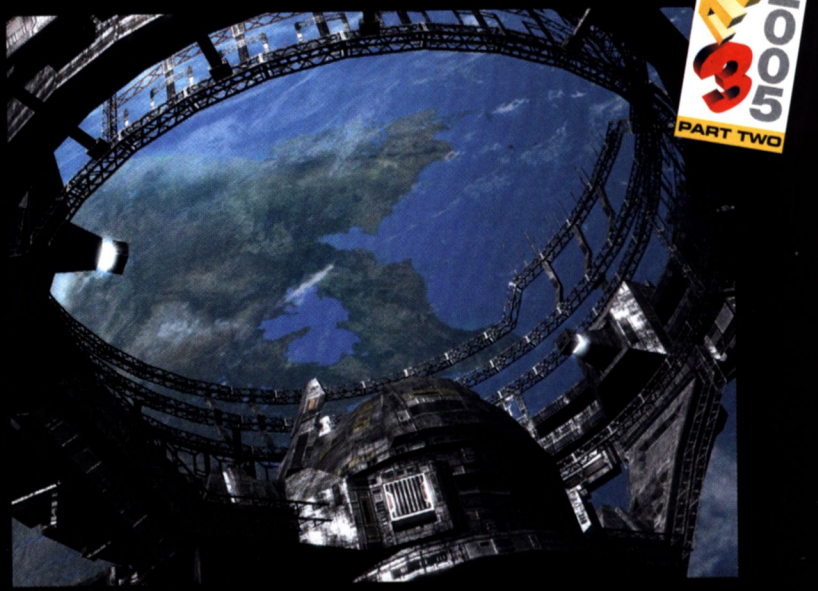
1993 The company puts a toe in the water with *Flies Attack On Earth*. You didn't miss anything.

1999 This is more like it. *X – Beyond The Frontier* reinvigorates the space sim genre by eschewing the *Wing Commander* approach and going for something more realistic.

2000 *X-Tension* provides the traditional expansion pack duties as well as adding a few extra features that pave the way for...

2003 *X2: The Threat*. Space sims will never be the same again, although strong competition from Microsoft's arcadey *Freelancer* doesn't help.

2005 The long-awaited *X2* expansion pack (*X2: The Return*) is finally shelved as it becomes clear that the list of features is strong enough to warrant a whole new game, with a whole new engine to boot.



No, that's not Earth.



"I think I'm being followed."

rechristen it whizzy twirl-o-matic motion and hope the name sticks.

ON THE MENU

The new menu system was also evident, although still in need of some polishing. Far prettier and friendlier than the clunky style of *X2*, information is now far easier to access. You can view your options easily without a glut of stuff cluttering up the whole screen (for the most part anyway), and there's much more in the way of functionality, with tons of tactical roads for you to explore. We would have taken the time to examine just how, when combined with the deeper auto-trading controls, it makes running a huge spice mining enterprise function more effectively than ever, but the show only lasted three days and there was a French gaming TV crew tapping their fingers against their watches and muttering something about roast beef.

HERE'S TO AGINCOURT

If there is still an area that needs further work, then perhaps we could point fingers at the combat. Obviously Egosoft is still coding away like there's no tomorrow, and reassures us that this is one of many areas still under development, but at this stage there are still some of the quirky handling issues displayed in *X2* prevalent here. Twirl-o-matic(™) helps a little, but unless things change dramatically, fans of fast-paced twitch fighting may still be left a little cold.

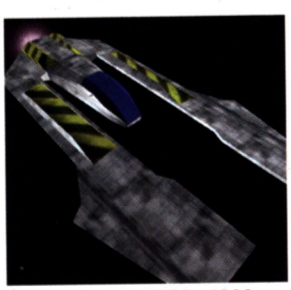
No such complaints about the meat of the game, though. All the promises about tighter plotting, more varied missions and added side content are all present and correct. The much-talked-about racing leagues weren't on display (but having recently attended a voice recording session for the game in Wimbledon and taken a featured role myself – cough – we've learnt that everything is bang on course in that respect), but menu options for Jobs and Bartering alongside the bulletin boards, and regular trading channels hint at interesting diversions from the main plot.

All in all then, a successful first public outing for a game that many have overlooked, but has always garnered a faithful crowd. Anything that can draw fanboy attention away from scantily-clad pretty ladies deserves all the success it can muster. PCZ

HISTORY OF THE FUTURE

JUST HOW GOOD IS THAT NEW ENGINE?

OK, you're sceptical. I can appreciate that. After all, this was supposed to be an add-on pack for a two-year-old game, so just how much difference will this brand new engine make? See for yourself with these handy dandy comparison shots of an Argon Fighter...



The original X-BTF in 1999.



And in *X-Tension*, in 2000.



Much slicker in *X2* in 2003.



The impressive 2005 model.



From *Homeworld* to *Dawn Of War* to the sunny meadows of Normandy...

HOWWII revisited. Plus some.

Heroes till the end of the fight...

ON THE CD ON THE DVD

COMPANY OF HEROES

***Will Porter* wonders whatever happened to the heroes. All the Shakespeare-oes. No more heroes anymore, no more heroes anymore etc etc**

RTS LORE states that all men move at the same, equal, deliberate pace. It also states that units will merrily lob grenades, throw pikes and generally perish with little more than a "Yes sir," "I'm OK milord," and a gut-wrenching scream to signal their demise. Well, *Company Of Heroes* wants to change all that. Of course, general gaming lore also demands that at least 40 per cent of games must now be set in World War II – something that *Company Of Heroes* doesn't want to change at all.

A new RTS in the model of *Soldiers: Heroes of World War II* (albeit with far larger squads, even more dynamic physics and a far greater likelihood of making lots and lots of money), *Company Of Heroes* wants to put you in charge of a squad of real, living, breathing people – people with lives that they really don't want to lose. This sense of preservation means that some will cower behind walls while bullets turn the sky grey; other more plucky recruits may leap into craters in the deformable landscape, and others still will simply try to preserve themselves in the best way available to them.

Basically, they're not automatons – with Relic promising up to 2,500 animations to each recruit's name. These range from casually flicking a cigarette butt to clutching a helmet in abject terror. There'll be a wealth of different human reactions to each and every situation in both movement and facial animation – whether it be a green, worried, raw recruit or a snarling, bolshy commander.

OH THE HUMANITY

The other holy grail that Relic (they of *Homeworld* and *Dawn Of War* fame) is chasing after with whip in hand is battlefield realism that goes beyond the, admittedly impressive, mud splatters and dull tint of tank warpaint. To this end, ladies and gentlemen, we have physics – physics that deform terrain, physics that collapse buildings in innumerable different ways, physics that have shrubs, trees, walls and people flying every which way but loose. It isn't just eye candy either, the idea is that gameplay can be directly affected by the rubble you create – whether your men are taking cover in the ruins of a farmhouse, or racing through a gap in a wall created by a rampaging Sherman tank with a customised plough attachment.

With direct control over your little fellows a vital part of the game, there'll be many satisfying grenades lobbed through windows, but Relic remains tight-lipped on exactly how the game itself will pan out – much is still shrouded in a mystical fog of war, including whether or not any plucky "What-ho!" Brits will get a piece of the shell-shaken spotlight. What we can expect, however, is some stunning, gritty action – heavy on the yelling and screaming and light on the clinical, swift pincer movement. Thirty seconds of watching infantry rounds pinging off Tiger tanks and off-screen artillery blowing holes in the French countryside has made us fully aware that *Company Of Heroes* is set to be really quite special. PZ



Even the tank is a hero.



Now rubble, once a farmhouse.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Relic
PUBLISHER THQ
ETA 2006
WEBSITE www.relic.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Real people in real danger
- Physics that genuinely affect gameplay
- Breaking the unspoken rules of the RTS
- Nice grimy graphics and mottled light effects
- We've never, ever seen a WWII game before. Honest



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Image courtesy of Cross Racing Championship 2005.

E3 2005 PART TWO



"Fancy a pint down the Golden Lion?"



"Hurry! Take refuge in the china shop!"

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Lionhead/Black & White Studios
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE www.lionhead.com
ETA Autumn

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Sequel to our favourite god game ever
- Mouse-driven player interface
- Hyper-intelligent new creatures
- Decides your Good/Evil status as you play
- Spectacular spell effects and physics system

Before colour, there was...

ON THE CD ON THE DVD

BLACK & WHITE 2

LAST PREVIEWED PCZONE ISSUE 151

'Evil' *Jamie Sefton* vs 'Good' Peter Molyneux – all the latest on Lionhead's god sim sequel

CV

LIONHEAD STUDIOS

Lionhead Studios was formed in 1997 by Peter Molyneux, with its first game *Black & White* becoming a worldwide smash in 2001. This year we're expecting three games from the flagship British developer: *Fable: The Lost Chapters*, *The Movies* and *Black & White 2*.

"THE OPTIMUM strategy is to have one man to five women," laughs Peter Molyneux. I'm assuming that the legendary developer and founder of Lionhead is talking about the ability to breed units in the forthcoming god game/strategy title *Black & White 2*. *PC ZONE* is here to see an exclusive demonstration of the new game, which has gone through huge changes in the past six months, with the team throwing out and rethinking the player interface.

"Our absolute objective was for people not to have to use the keyboard for anything, unless you're a very advanced player," continues Molyneux. "We're attempting to make the whole of *B&W2* playable just on the mouse, which I believe still hasn't been fully explored as a gaming device."

Black & White 2 involves an epic battle between your Greek people and a brutal Norse tribe, ruled by an evil computer-controlled AI deity. "One of the really nice things is that you can hear your opponent thinking," continues Molyneux. "He'll look at your stuff and say, "Ah, you've built lots of houses – you're going to create an army!" Your enemy will react to what you're doing constantly, giving you the feeling that you're playing against something that's alive."

"Casting spells and toasting the enemy – that's my favourite part"
PETER MOLYNEUX DEVELOPER AND FOUNDER, LIONHEAD

MYSTERIOUS WAY

You interact with the world, as in the first game, with a ghostly hand of god, that's used to doing everything from the placement of buildings and roads, to picking up poor townspeople and flinging them viciously across the landscape to a painful death. However, you can only affect the area inside the green circle of influence around your town centre (also from *B&W1*), that expands or retracts based on how many people believe in your godly existence.

The town centre is the major hub of any settlement, and in keeping with *B&W2*'s icon-free intelligent interface, "suggests" the buildings you should create next to best improve your cities – although you can ignore the advice if you prefer (see 'Sim Cities', right). If you need to check on the stats of your individual minions, all you do is move your hand over them and a list of info pops up displaying their wants, needs and happiness, allowing you to make informed decisions – which is obviously quite important for an omniscient being.

At the beginning of the game, food and shelter are the most important items, but that changes as your people become more sophisticated. However, to ensure your population keeps expanding, you need to manage the two resources of wood and ore. You can plant trees and forests to create plentiful supplies of





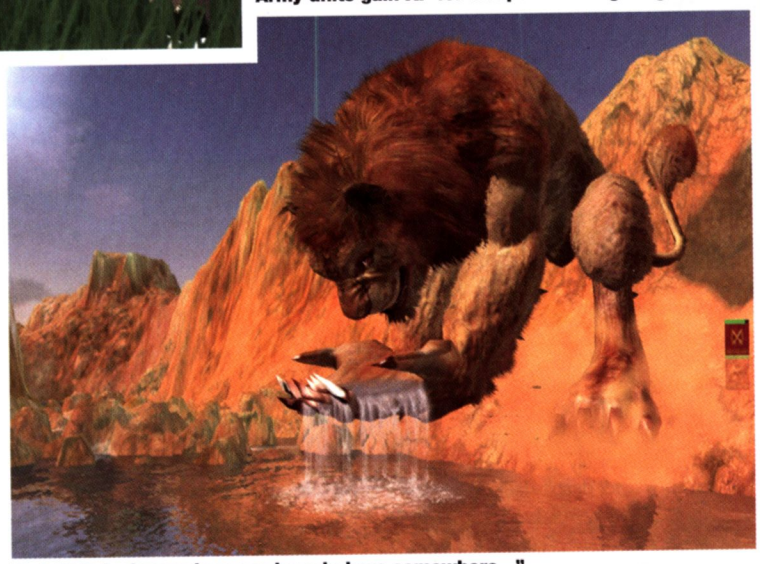
Your Good and Evil advisors are back in the new game.



Lion baiting: a mini-game in *B&W2*.



Army units gain XP for weapons and fighting moves.



"I definitely dropped my car keys in here somewhere..."

wood, but ore is in short supply and has to be acquired – an important strategy in *B&W2*, as the resource is needed to make military units, town defences and important buildings such as altars. These holy places are where you can conjure up magic spells – such as Water – that can either be poured (for watering crops, putting out fires) or thrown (for more aggressive water bomb attacks).

Eventually you can earn epic spells, including Volcano, that when cast on an enemy town, violently erupts out of the ground, spectacularly hurling molten rocks into the air and spewing white hot lava over defenceless buildings and people. "That's always my favourite part," says Molyneux, "casting spells and toasting the enemy."

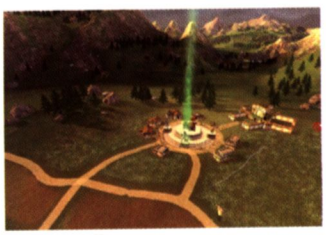
SIM CITIES

BLACK & WHITE 2 MAKES CREATING TOWNS A FAST AND SIMPLE EXPERIENCE

Town Centres are the hub of any settlement, and will automatically suggest the best building to create next – something that Peter Molyneux is particularly pleased about. "Game menus are frustratingly global, but this makes it fantastically simple – now when I need to know what each town needs the most, I just look at the Town Centre."

Constructing buildings is simply a matter of clicking the mouse, dragging them off the town centre and plonking them down where you'd like the people to make them. You can even drag a building to construct from another building – you don't have to keep traipsing back to the Town Centre to get it.

Creating roads is similarly straightforward; grab from the centre and drag away, with the road cleverly winding itself around houses and other obstacles. Within a few minutes you can create large and complex towns with the minimum of effort.



Start small...



Add more buildings...



...Until the town is complete.

CREATURE CONFLICTS

Black & White 2 wouldn't be complete without a creature – your cuddly (or nasty) visual representation on earth. You can choose between an ape, a cow, a lion or a wolf, and in the new game, the animal is hugely more intelligent. There is now a sliding scale between pet (where he'll do whatever he wants), gatherer (where he'll collect resources for you), and robot (where he'll obey without question – useful for the army). "What we found in *B&W* was that some people loved the pet-like behaviour, but others found it incredibly frustrating if the creature wouldn't stay still and do what you wanted – so, you now have a choice," adds Molyneux.

Training and teaching the animal is easy – you can punish the creature by slapping it if it does something wrong, or reward it by stroking gently if it pleases you. You can also bring up the animal's 'mind interface' and go over any lessons at any time to tailor behaviour – you don't have to wait for the creature to do something before you can act on it, as you had to in *B&W1*.

But, this is a *Black & White* game, so remember everything you do in the world affects whether you end up being the nice kind of god who dishes out limited-edition orange Kit Kats, or the vengeful god who forces everyone to eat Tesco Value Chocolate Digestives. "You can use an army for defence and that's good," explains Molyneux," but if you use force to take control of settlements, that's evil." Killing by inaction is also counted as an evil deed, so for example, if you don't let a group of migrating refugees into your town, and they die of starvation outside the gates, you'll go further down the dark path. Everything changes visually too. 'Good' kingdoms have carpets of flowers, beautiful overgrown white temples and sunny skies – 'Evil' kingdoms have gnarled trees, spiky black gothic temples and oppressive darkness.

From my time at Lionhead witnessing the game's demonstration, one thing is evident – with its melding of RTS and god game elements, good/evil moral system, real-time physics, emergent AI, intelligent mouse-driven interface and gorgeous fully-realised world, *Black & White 2* is incredibly ambitious. With a release mooted for autumn, let's just hope Peter Molyneux can tear himself away from those five women to finish it... PCZ

Tank rush...

CODENAME: PANZERS – PHASE TWO

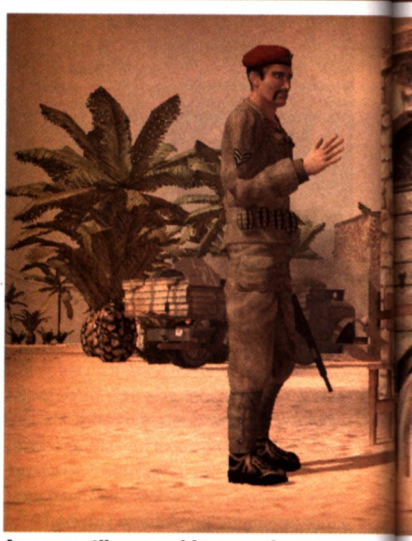
ON THE DVD

Richie Shoemaker **pops his head out the turret and spots another WWII RTS thundering toward him...**



"Advance! Advance! Oh no, my mistake... Retreat! Retreat!"





Arm-wrestling was big even then.

IT'S HUMAN nature to have preconceptions, especially when you're a games reviewer who specialises in – among other things – World War II strategy games. When you're presented with a game that appears to be achingly similar to every other like-minded select-and-direct-a-thon, it's sometimes very tempting to dismiss it before it's even been installed, as happened last year when I reviewed *Codename: Panzers*.

Back then, I tried to recall what it was that set *Codename: Panzers* apart from the likes of *Blitzkrieg* and *Soldiers*, and, with pictures of 3D rendered carnage floating around my head, none of which were specific to any particular game, I found myself politely declining the offer. More fool me, for despite lacking the epic battles of *Sudden Strike* and appearing derivative and only slightly inferior next to the then-recent *Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII*, *Panzers* also happened to be one of the most out-and-out fun strategy games of the year. No rash predictions this time.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Stormregion
PUBLISHER CDV
WEBSITE www.panzers.com
ETA July

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Good-looking and easy to play
- Story-driven campaign
- Aims to chronicle the lesser-known engagements of WWII
- Small scale, but big on fun



"Whaddaya mean, my hat's better than yours?"

"Yes please!" was my coquettish reply to playtest the near-complete code.

RUNNING MEN

Panzer's appeal isn't immediately apparent. Looking at the screenshots, you can see it's a decent-looking game powered by a 3D engine that should be a source of great pride to the mothers of its developers: waterfalls cascade into glimmering streams as birds circle in the sky above – very lovely it all looks. However, should you be more interested in the human misery that's portrayed, that looks good too. Panzers is blessed with all manner of wartime vehicles, buildings and infantry, faithfully recreated in all their polygonal finery and eager to blow each other into oblivion should you find yourself taking control of them.

There are some wonderful touches, such as the way that when asked to change stance from a stealthy crouch to a full-pelt run, soldiers will clasp their weapon in one hand so as to be able to





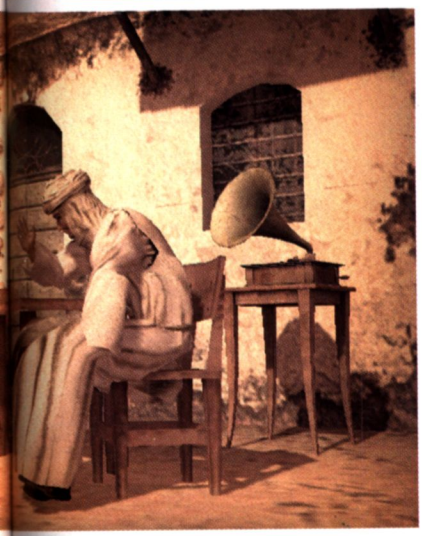
THREE'S A... TRILOGY

WAIT – THERE'S MORE!

Phase Three **has already been announced and rather unsurprisingly, nobody is saying anything about what will be in store for fear of taking precious column inches away from the coverage of *Phase Two*. However, our spies have been out and we have it good authority that the final part in the *Panzers* trilogy will follow in about 12 months time and is set to feature an updated (rather than a completely new) 3D engine. Aircraft tactics will also be receiving an overhaul and with a setting that will include South East Asia, we can assume that naval units will be making a guest appearance in some form or another.**



Naval ships, broken fences. It's what romantic sunsets are all about.



use their arms to pump up a bit of speed. While in itself this is hardly a reason to go out and buy the game, it's indicative of the love this developer has for the series.

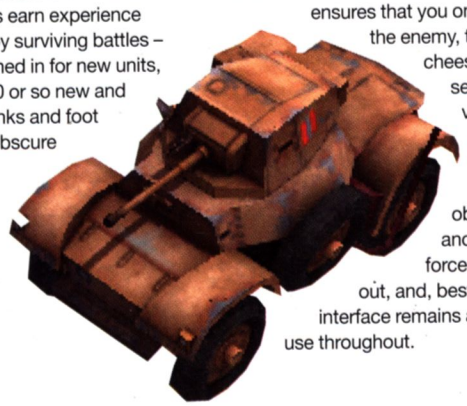
Similarly, you might find it difficult to work up yourself into a froth over the features that may be adorning the back of the packaging. For example, the campaigns are entirely linear at a time when most people demand and expect at least a basic grand strategy map. Resource management is off the menu and although units earn experience (Prestige Points) by surviving battles – which can be cashed in for new units, in terms of the 100 or so new and revised planes, tanks and foot soldier – only an obscure handful are truly unique to the game. All of which means that they're only of interest to a sad select few – like me.

"Why should you buy *Panzers – Phase Two*? Because like the original it's fun, fast, simple and well-crafted"



It's true what they say – mad dogs and Englishmen...

So why should you consider buying *Codename: Panzers – Phase Two* on its release? The answer is simple; because, like the original, it's fun, fast, simple and well-crafted. The fixed angle camera ensures that you only fight the enemy, the often cheesy story serves up a variety of missions, both in their objectives and the way forces are doled out, and, best of all, the interface remains a joy to use throughout.





Flying hiiiiigh, high... Oh bugger...

Despite being a simple game to get to grips with, don't mistake *Panzers* for being a simplistic game. Sure, it favours stimulation over simulation, and liberties have been taken with historical accuracy – El Alamein being reduced to a hilltop skirmish – but as such sacrifices have been made in the name of gameplay, even the most hardcore military buff would be cruel indeed to dismiss the game. Part of the appeal is that instead of trying to squeeze in features that are unique to the detriment of basic functionality, Stormregion has made it the company's aim to make everything work well – the fact that it appears to do so is a unique enough feature in itself.

A LITTLE BIT MORE

Of course, *Panzers* isn't the finished article quite yet – there are some bugs to iron out, and it would have been nice to have tried out the multiplayer game. However, on the strength of the present version there seems no reason that *Panzers – Phase Two* won't at least equal the success of the first game. Rest assured that if I get the call to arms for the full review next month, I'll be sure to sign up. PZ

CV

STORMREGION

In the space of a few short years, the Hungarian developer has built up a reputation for creating fun strategy games that are pleasing on the eye. With *Panzers – Phase Three* due next year, let's hope the trend continues...

2001	*S.W.I.N.E.* is a fine debut, with a graphical engine far in advance of its contemporaries, but the Pigs vs Bunnies premise was very silly.
2004	*Phase One* of *Panzers* rolls out and is a sizeable global hit, some proclaiming it an equal to the likes of *Command & Conquer* and *StarCraft*.

E3 2005 PART TWO



Someone's been to the dentist recently. Show-off.



"Ice to see you, to see you, ice!"



The new spells are spectacular.

The stuff of legends...

FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS

Are you sitting comfortably? Good, then *Sam Kieldsen* will begin...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Lionhead Studios
PUBLISHER Microsoft Game Studios
WEBSITE www.lionhead.com/fabletlc
ETA Q4 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Bigger than the Xbox version
- Beautiful high-res visuals
- 16 new missions
- 9 new regions

LET'S GET this out of the way immediately – *Fable: The Lost Chapters* isn't going to be a simple port of the Xbox version. Don't forget, *Fable* was originally envisaged as a PC title, and it's looking like this might well be the edition that Peter Molyneux and his Lionhead cohorts were planning on making all along. It's around a third bigger, for starters. Sure, Xbox owners are currently turning as green as the light emanating from their console, but c'est la vie. You got it a full year before PC gamers, fellas, and now it's our turn for a treat.

If you're unfamiliar with *Fable*, it's a combat-heavy action RPG with one hell of a hook: you start off as a child, and can live your in-game life – right up to old age – pretty much how you see fit. Any actions you choose to take will slowly warp your character's appearance and the way in which other characters react to him; it's kind of like *Fallout* meets *Black & White* with a dash of *Knights Of The Old Republic*.

I PUT A SPELL ON YOU

The Lost Chapters is the Xbox version plus a heap of added content. There are more missions to be undertaken, more regions to explore, more spells to fling around and more people to meet. Or kill, if you want – like we said, exactly how you play the game is up to you. New enemies like the Ice Troll (big, white and made, funnily enough, of ice) and Summoner (nasty über-mage who does a natty line in electric balls) also make their debut.

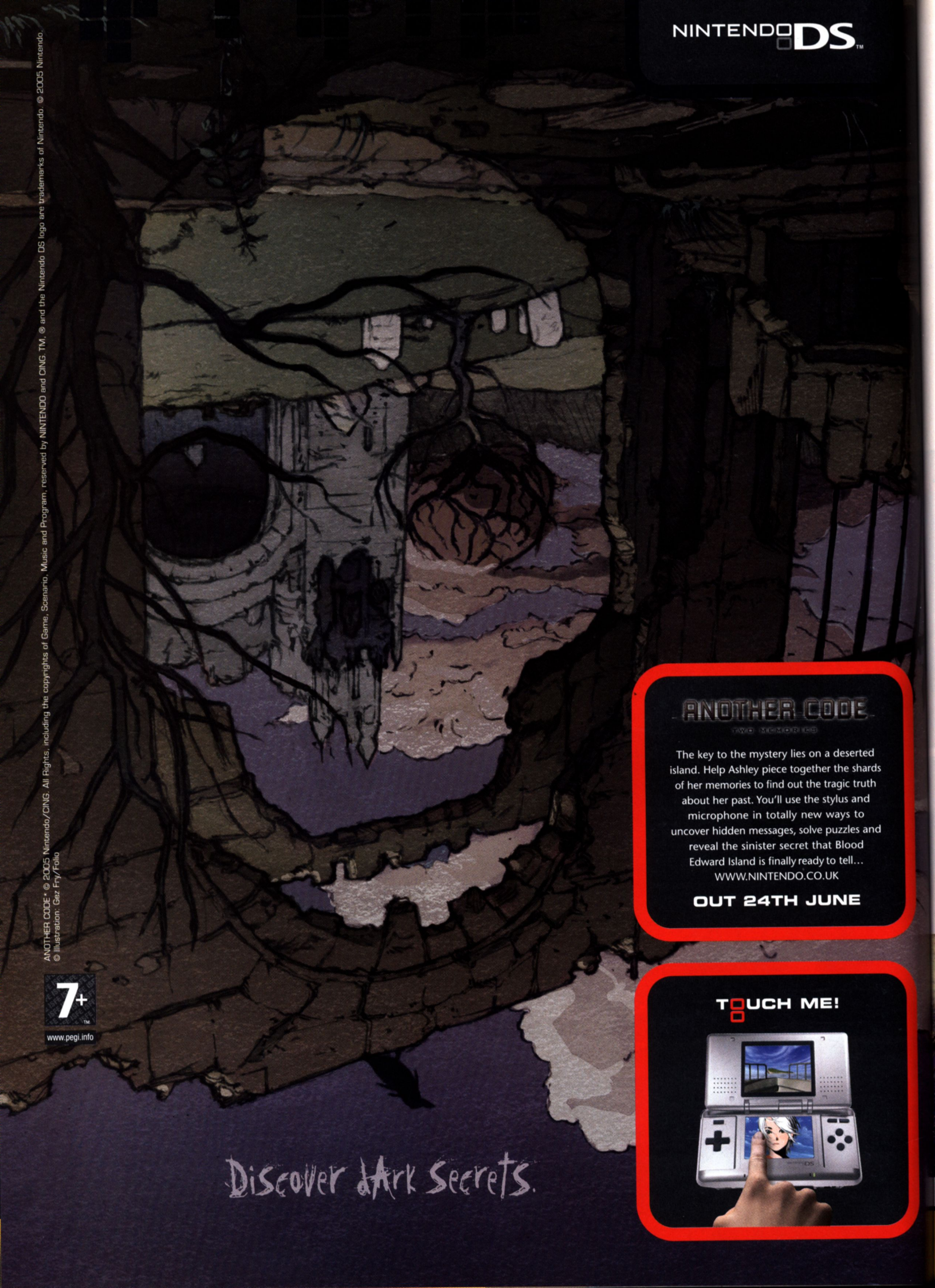
Both these baddies look fantastic in action, and much of this is down to the revamped graphics engine powering the game's visuals: high-resolution textures, improved draw distance and bump-mapping on characters all come courtesy of *Fable's* move to the PC.

Also getting an overhaul is the control system. We all know that what works for a gamepad probably won't work for a keyboard and mouse, and Lionhead is particularly keen on making combat feel right for PC gamers. Sword and bow controls will be assigned to your right hand and spell control to your left. This means that you can hack a couple of times, then immediately loose off a fireball or put up a magical shield.

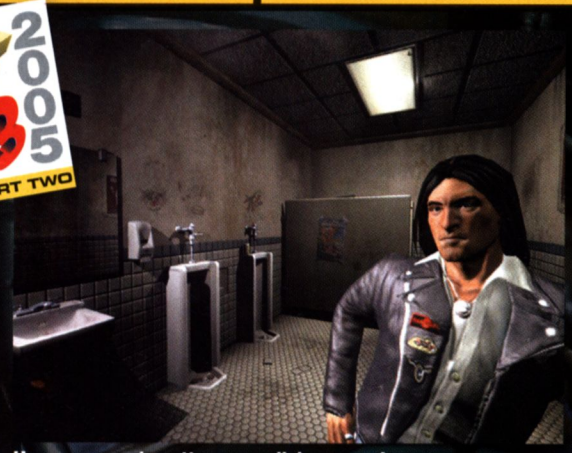
EVERYBODY DANCE NOW

You can also expect to see lots in the way of what Lionhead calls 'fun' content: stuff that doesn't really affect the plot, but simply makes *Fable* more enjoyable to play. You can import images to tattoo upon your character's body, make a photo journal that can be displayed online and prance around like a flamenco dancer.

Lionhead is currently polishing the game like mad, and the version we saw looked tantalisingly close to completion. We'll soon know if Molyneux's mob can deliver the definitive *Fable* it's been promising all along. PCZ


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ANOTHER CODE
TWO MEMORIES
The key to the mystery lies on a deserted island. Help Ashley piece together the shards of her memories to find out the tragic truth about her past. You'll use the stylus and microphone in totally new ways to uncover hidden messages, solve puzzles and reveal the sinister secret that Blood Edward Island is finally ready to tell...
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E3 2005 PART TWO



Hey, everyone's gotta earn a living somehow.



Wait. Is that a Dalek in the background?





Religious fervour...

PREY

Big chief *Jamie Sefton* dances with aliens in Human Head's spiritual sci-fi shooter

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Human Head Studios/ 3D Realms
PUBLISHER Take 2
ETA Spring 2006
WEBSITE www.humanhead.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Uses the *Doom 3* engine
- Innovative gravity puzzles and organic alien weaponry
- Cool Cherokee 'spirit' powers
- Fantastic 'pod' spaceship to fly around
- Multiplayer

WHEN THE dust finally settled after the E3 videogames expo in May, it was obvious that one of the biggest hits of the show was *Prey* – a triumphant return for the sci-fi shooter that has now been in development on and off for nearly a decade. *PC ZONE* caught up with the Human Head Studios team in LA, who showed us an extensive demo of some of the innovative features in the game, and talked exclusively about its development.

"We know that the *Doom 3* engine is not very good at having lots and lots of creatures on screen at once," said CEO Tim Gerritsen, dropping a rather large bombshell. "You can either fight that, or you can come up with ways to use it. We decided to focus on more entertaining combat, making creatures that are more interesting to fight, so they'll use the world around them – such as portals that can open up anywhere, allowing them to jump in around you."

HUMANS FOR LUNCH

Prey's lead character is a Cherokee Native American called Tommy, who at the beginning of the game is stuck on a reservation in a dead-end job, and has turned his back on the ancient beliefs of his people. Tommy becomes the reluctant hero when his girlfriend Jenny is abducted by aliens bent on turning the human race into food and material for genetic experimentation. The action takes place in various dimensions, the main one being a massive spaceship called the Dyson Sphere, which is inhabited by a menagerie of nightmarish monsters.

"The sphere is a living spaceship," explained Gerritsen. "It harvests people and divides them up into those who actively want to work for it, food, and those to experiment with genetically. It's a mish-mash of all different races." You blast your way through creepy-looking, technologically advanced future-scapes, with some hugely innovative uses of 360-degree levels,



"One alien creature has crab-like legs that, when pulled off, can be thrown as improvised grenades"

including gravity walkways (allowing you to stomp up walls and across ceilings), and fiendish puzzles that require the use of gravity switches that flip the entire world instantly on its head.

In an amazing sequence, Gerritsen showed Tommy taking control of a *2001: A Space Odyssey*-style pod, that you can manoeuvre around the open 3D space, grabbing hold of any nearby monsters with an energy beam and hurling them into oblivion. "There'll be free-roaming areas where you can go anywhere you want with the vehicle and land on planetoids, for example. Also there are transporters, where you can fly your vehicle into a ring that locks you into it and takes you through some sections, before releasing you to free-roam again. We wanted to mix it up and constantly keep it interesting."

SPIRIT IN THE SKY

With the aid of his wise old grandfather, Tommy eventually learns several spiritual powers: Spirit Walk allows Tommy to leave his body for a short time to walk through force fields or past enemies and fire his Spirit Bow, while Death Walk is the ability to fight your way out of an eerie ethereal dimension that you are transported to if you get killed in the game. You also have a spirit totem, basically a hawk that sits on your shoulder and can also fly around the world to point out interesting things for you, translate indecipherable alien text and language, and even attack enemies.

As for weaponry, the only item Tommy can use from back home is a pipe wrench. "He's basically a mechanic, and as the game progresses, he discovers the alien armoury – which consists of different types of organic weapons. There's a lot of fun to be had figuring out how they work," said Gerritsen. One such weapon is a creature with crab-like legs, that when pulled off, can be thrown and used as improvised grenades.

But what about *Prey*'s multiplayer aspect? Gerritsen kept schtum about the specifics, but revealed that much of what is original about the single-player experience will be incorporated into the online modes. "The *Doom 3* engine has its limitations in multiplayer, but you'll still see portals, you'll see gravity flipping, you'll see vehicles, and you'll see the localised gravity around the spheres." Expect a major hands-on feature on *Prey* very soon... PCZ

E3 2005 PART TWO

CV

HUMAN HEAD STUDIOS

Based in Madison, Wisconsin, USA, Human Head was set up in 1997. According to CEO Tim Gerritsen, the company is currently concentrating all its resources on *Prey*.

2000 *Rune* is a not-bad RPG that we gave 79 per cent back in the day. An expansion pack *Halls Of Valhalla* was released the following year.

2004 *Dead Man's Hand*. Oh dear. Fortunately, Prey is looking a universe apart from this mediocre Wild West-themed shooter, which we shot down at high noon with a 56 per cent score.

Q&A



TIMOTHY GERRITSEN

CEO OF HUMAN HEAD, ON *PREY*'S "EXTENDED" CREATION TIME

PCZ First, why has it taken so long?

TG We got involved in late 2001, when 3D Realms wanted to revive the property. Basically, when we started the game, we decided to pursue the *Doom 3* technology. We were actually the first *Doom 3* licensees, and we knew going into it that the engine wasn't going to be finished – but the problem was that id didn't know either. So everybody kind of agreed: "OK, we're going into *Doom 3* – we don't know when it's gonna be done, but here we go."

PCZ How did you develop *Prey* when you didn't have the finished *Doom 3* engine to work with?

TG Well, the engine wasn't done until August last year, so we used a lot of the time to basically learn next-gen techniques. We did a lot of R&D and a lot of prototyping – playing with stuff, seeing what worked, what didn't. The thing about the new technology is that it's really, really difficult to develop for – far more difficult than we initially anticipated. Much of the stuff we did first was, quite frankly, not up to par, so there was a fair amount that we scrapped.

PCZ Was all the gravity flipping and other clever stuff in the blueprint for the original game?

TG: No, but it was in our original blueprint when we took over the reins of *Prey*. The Wall Walk and gravity flipping we wanted right away. Spirit Walk came along a little bit later – it was just a natural development from working on our ideas. So we've got all these tiny bits – Wall Walk, Spirit Walk, Death Walk – but the really cool thing is when we combine them together.

E3 2005 PART 1

Sequel without a name...

OFP2

The sequel to *Operation Flashpoint* goes incognito. Naming names: *Anthony Holden*



It's 2010 and an international coalition is fighting to preserve global stability. Not looking promising is it?



***Big Brother 6* was one series too far.**



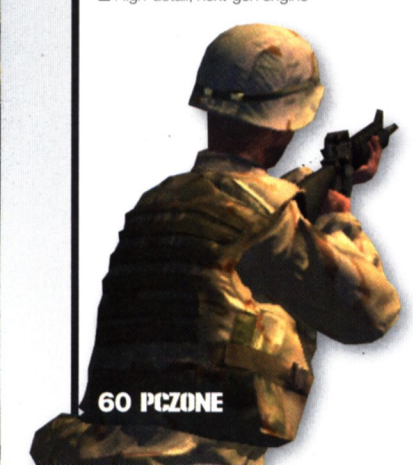
Rollin', rollin', rollin'...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Bohemia Interactive
PUBLISHER TBC
WEBSITE www.bistudio.com
ETA Christmas 2006

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- True sequel to *Operation Flashpoint*
- Scarily authentic military sim
- Extensive new role-playing elements
- Huge, well-populated environments
- High-detail, next-gen engine



IF YOU HAVEN'T read our news report on page 24, there's a situation here you need to catch up on. *Operation Flashpoint 2* no longer exists. Or at least, Bohemia Interactive has split with its publisher and lost the rights to the name, which means the long-awaited sequel is now operating under a codename. Or actually, a variety of codenames, our favourite being *OFP2*.

What the final name will be is unclear – Bohemia is reluctant to announce anything, because there's still a chance it will patch things up with Codemasters. And if not, the new publisher will probably put a committee on the case and call it something like *War On Terror 2010*.

The good news is twofold. First, nothing else has changed, and whatever it ends up being called, this will be a true and faithful sequel to *Operation Flashpoint*. And second, without any evil marketing types in the way, we actually get to see the bloody thing now.

Before you get too excited however, it's still very much a work in progress, perhaps 30 per cent complete and at least 18 months away. Nonetheless, it's possible to get a pretty good picture of where things are heading – bigger and better obviously, but with an unrestricted, open-ended design brief that can only be compared with the likes of *STALKER* and the *Elder Scrolls* series. Bohemia MD Marek Spanél talks us through his vision.

"It's a different concept from the original game. We've got a fully dynamic environment, where basically the only givens you have are your starting position and one of several possible enemy



Now is not a good time to change your contact lenses.



It's good, to touch, the green green grass of home...





positions. Objectives are dynamically generated as well. This means that unlike in *Flashpoint*, where you had fixed missions like 'move to this point and attack this village', now you might have some main objectives, like 'liberate the country', with smaller ones assigned along the way. You might be going somewhere and you receive a request: 'We need a squad here', so you go and do that."

NEW WORLD ORDER

The level of freedom implied is impressive, but it's almost daunting at the same time. Nevertheless, Spanél assures us that you always have something to do, or indeed a choice of several things to do, depending on how you want to play the game.

"You might have a list of options, like go to this village and grab these papers, or go here and attack this, and meanwhile someone's attacked your base, so you have to defeat them. Or maybe they don't attack – that's the dynamic nature."

The setting for the game is the near future. A number of dangerous, erm, flashpoints have developed across Europe and Asia, and you play part of an international coalition sent to intervene. Through the course of the game you assume three different characters, each corresponding to a separate, self-contained chapter of the game.

In chapter one, you're a US Marine Corps soldier. In chapter two, you play a US Army officer, a ruthless careerist who has to juggle the politics of promotion with the needs of his own squad. And in chapter three you're a Special Operative, seeing the war from a very different perspective. Each chapter will be persistent, with plots and events evolving according to your actions.

"We've also added a role-playing style to the action style that's already there," says Spanél. "So as well as the persistent stories, we've got conversations, character development, skill, attributes and personalities for the soldiers in your squad. You can also talk to characters in the game and ask about facts in the game world, and it all fits into the whole picture."

SUPER SIZE ME

The world of *OFP2* is also set to be a lot bigger – and busier – than the islands of *Flashpoint*, and a full-scale war will often be raging around you. "We want the maps to be filled by troops," says Spanél. "On screen you might have several hundred units, but in total on the map you have a statistical calculation for tens of thousands of units fighting a dynamic conflict."

Unsurprisingly, *OFP2* is also pushing the boundaries of authenticity and accuracy in military games. Not only is every piece of equipment 100 per cent accurate, but every vehicle in the game is correctly modelled and animated, every building is fully destructible (see 'Bringing Down The House', above), even every tree and plant is botanically correct. Indeed, this is where much of the work of the past three years has gone – into making an engine and a game that, while nowhere near as visually impressive as the likes of *UT2007*, can make some pretty impressive claims of its own. Take the ballistics system, for example. Not only is it extremely accurate at modelling bullet paths, it calculates the energy of a bullet at every moment to determine deflection, penetration and damage.

It's mind-boggling stuff, and in a way we can see why publishers don't like Bohemia Interactive. The Czech team has just spent three years modelling obscure Russian tanks and developing an engine that measures bullet penetration, and yet the gameplay is still at prototype stage. Ultimately of course, it's we who will reap the benefits. *OFP2* looks likely to be the most authentic, detailed and freeform military sim ever attempted, and we wouldn't have it any other way. PZ

BRINGING DOWN THE HOUSE

EVERY BRICK IS REAL IN *OFP2'S* AWESOME DESTRUCTIVE ENVIRONMENTS



Just like blowing up LegoLand. Worth thinking about it, isn't it...

Most of the time, when a game claims to have 'destructible environments', it really means you can make the odd building disappear, to be replaced by a pre-sculpted 'demolished' version of said edifice. At best, it might have one or two stages of partial devastation in between. *OFP2* is taking this much-hyped feature and making it real, with buildings that blow up just like yours would if George Bush took a sudden dislike to you.

"Our buildings are constructed like Lego houses," says Bohemia MD Marek Spanél. "You can level them down to the last stone, or blast out a small corner where a sniper is hiding." What's more, every brick is a physics object and every collapse is physically simulated, meaning that if you're caught inside, all the bricks will fly around and hurt you.

It's also fully scalable, so if your PC is struggling, some pieces will disappear and be replaced by generic rubble. "The worst case scenario for us," says Spanél, "would be if you had a full city and someone just carpet-bombed the whole place. It would be the ultimate test of the engine, but because of the scalability it should work with no loss in performance levels."



You play three different characters through the course of the game.

CV

Bohemia Interactive

BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE STUDIO

Founded in Prague in 1999, BIS is a military sim specialist dedicated to pushing the limits of reality and freedom in games. The ground-breaking *Operation Flashpoint* was released in 2001, and at this point remains Bohemia's only retail product, not counting the *Resistance* expansion released the following year. The studio also maintains a strong relationship with the US military, providing special versions of its technology for use in training programmes. Its next title will be the *Op Flashpoint* revamp *Armed Assault* (see news, page 24).

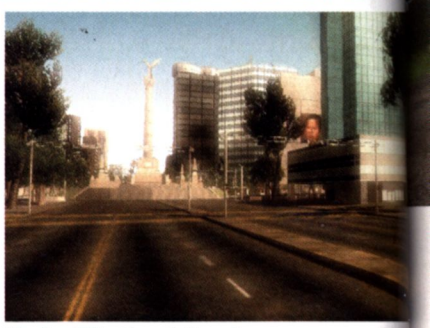












First it was Speedy Gonzalez, then it was Corona, now it's *Ghost Recon 3*.

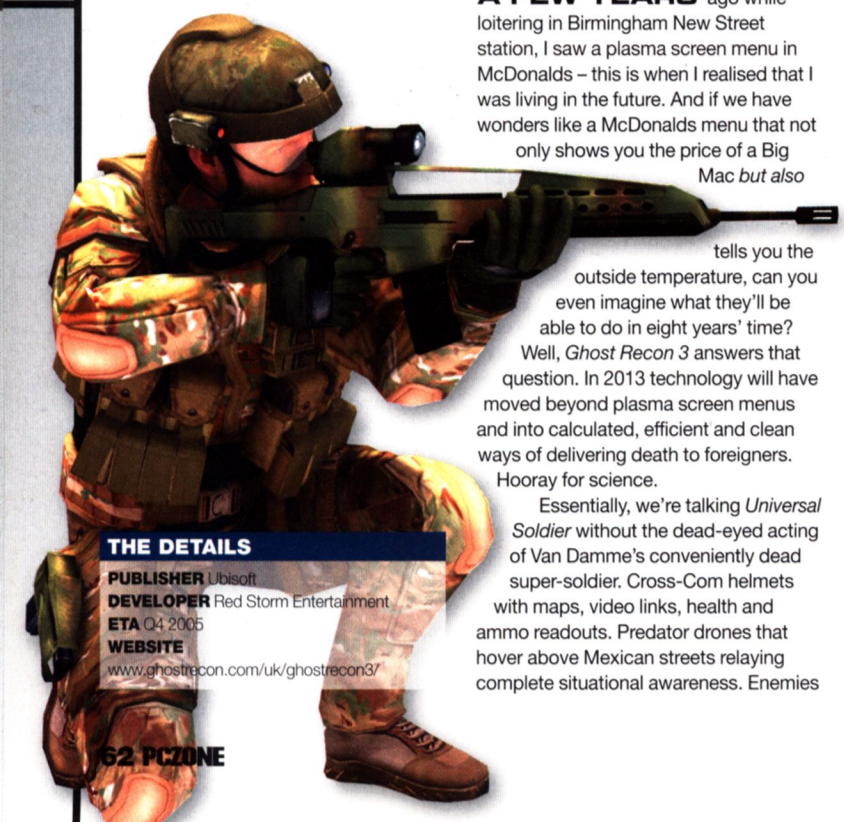
Mexico City. Population: 0.

Ghost in the machines...

ON THE CD ON THE DVD

GHOST RECON 3

The permanently lost and bemused *Will Porter* gets briefed on how Integrated Warfare Systems will help his Situational Awareness. Still, it won't help him find his keys



A FEW YEARS ago while loitering in Birmingham New Street station, I saw a plasma screen menu in McDonalds – this is when I realised that I was living in the future. And if we have wonders like a McDonalds menu that not only shows you the price of a Big Mac *but also* tells you the outside temperature, can you even imagine what they'll be able to do in eight years' time?

Well, *Ghost Recon 3* answers that question. In 2013 technology will have moved beyond plasma screen menus and into calculated, efficient and clean ways of delivering death to foreigners. Hooray for science.

Essentially, we're talking *Universal Soldier* without the dead-eyed acting of Van Damme's conveniently dead super-soldier. Cross-Com helmets with maps, video links, health and ammo readouts. Predator drones that hover above Mexican streets relaying complete situational awareness. Enemies marked out in red, friendlies in green and the slightly suspicious in orange. Sniper rifles that can both see and blast through brick walls. Full Satellite readouts and assistance from gunships and airstrikes. The works.

FUTURE SHOCK

But whereas the technology behind your four-man team of Ghosts seems cold and efficient, the battlescapes they find themselves in certainly are not. From the dusty slums of Mexico City to the massive explosions and bloody violence in the high and mighty central business district there's a real gutsy feel to the visuals of *Ghost Recon 3* – ably complemented by a real over-the-shoulder documentary feel to the way the camera chases behind your character when you flick into third-person.

The entire Ghost squad are remarkably solid, with idle animations and general movement so fluid and free of the normal cycled animation that you're genuinely fooled into thinking that they're real people. Well, if they weren't built of pixels or on a screen you might think they were real anyway. If you were a bit slow. Basically, what I'm saying is that they look real – you get the picture.

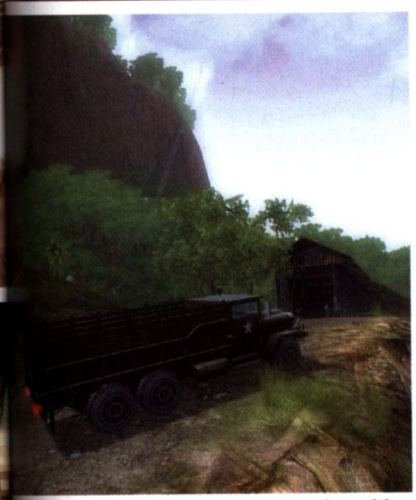
So it's three virtual days, 20 hours of gameplay, seamless links from level to level (a gun-toting Black Hawk ride carrying you to another part of the city, for example) and a US President kidnapped by Mexican rebels who's in dire need of a bullet-ridden rescue.

Essentially, it's yet another squad shooter – but it seems to be one from a developer and a publisher who have learnt the dangers that console bias brings, and are doing their level best to provide a game suited to each of its many platforms. Whether the gameplay stands up to the stunning ways in which these visuals shift about the place is yet to be seen but, even though Mr Clancy's books have now turned to turgid shite, in the past he's made some exceedingly good games. PZ

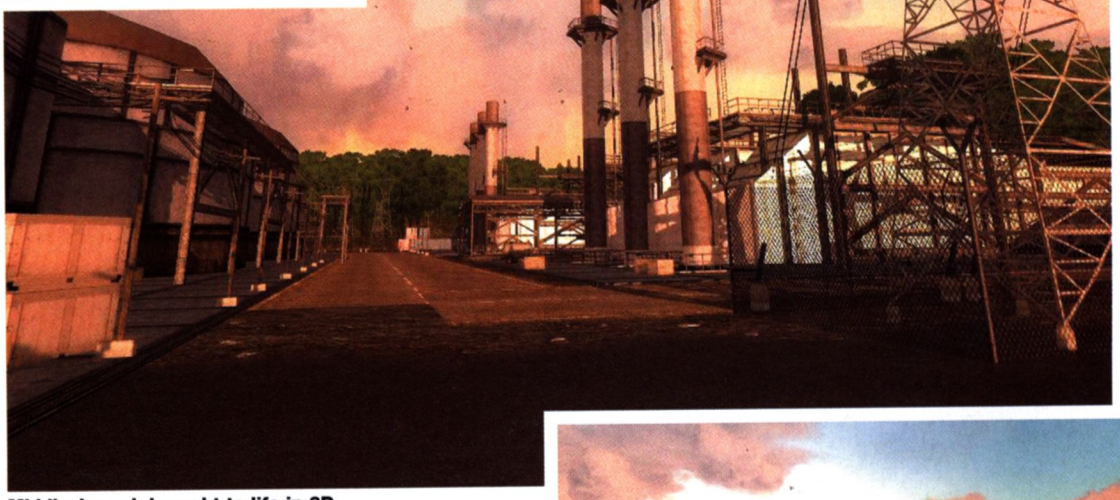
THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Ubisoft
DEVELOPER Red Storm Entertainment
ETA Q4 2005
WEBSITE
www.ghostrecon.com/uk/ghostrecon3/





There's over 100 vehicles to play with.



Middlesbrough brought to life in 3D.

Working holiday...

JUST CAUSE

The office supply of suntan oil has taken quite a hit lately. Luckily, *Paul Presley*'s mind is on things other than bronzing

YOU KNOW, between computer games, airport novels, Jerry Bruckheimer films and the American military, the world is soon going to run out of snappy, thrill-packed, two-word, dynamic-sounding, cliché-ridden titles. Then where will games like *Far Cry*, *Boiling Point*, *Cold Fear* and, indeed, *Just Cause* be left? Floundering either with poetic-sounding names such as *An Island Of Dreams* or, better yet, crudely Orwellian monikers – *Shooting Game X-337-B (Contemporary, Vehicular)*. Good thing too.

E3 was full of such nonsense this year, which is unfortunate given the potential of some of the games forced to wear such titular strait jackets. *Just Cause* being a case in point; this is quite the promising-looking attempt to blend *Far Cry*'s lush tropical visuals with *GTA*'s freeform, go anywhere, drive anything, do as you please mechanics.

There is a plot, something about an undercover CIA agent with an improbable name (Rico Rodriguez I think, although it might as well have been Rick Hardnut or Dirk Gun for all it really matters) sent to the fictional South American isle of Los Madeuperito (*San Esperito, I think you'll find – Geographical Ed*) to uncover a stockpile of WMDs and overthrow the government in much the same manner the *Mission: Impossible* team used to do every week in the '60s. Except with loads more gunplay and vehicle action, which, let me tell you, is no bad thing.

STUNTS... LOVE 'EM

Suddenly, before our eyes, *Just Cause* really started to shine. We were shown demonstrations of just a few of the hundreds of vehicles you get to play around with (reminding us oddly of the old 8-bit classic *Midwinter*), but what we saw included such feats as jumping out of a plane, freefalling through the sky for absolutely ages, finally deploying a parachute, gliding down to a random spot on the whole (huge) island, steering towards a moving car, landing on it, pulling out the driver and racing away to freedom. James Bond eat your heart out.





What a lovely spot – perfect for dogging.

Freedom is the key to both the plot and the gameplay. Notionally you are tasked with recruiting allies, influencing various power groups and generally causing plenty of destabilising trouble as you complete the 20-odd missions, from setting up to eventually offing the ruling dictator. Along the way there are hundreds of side quests used to drum up support for your plans, or there's just the thrill of exploration to enjoy – you can go anywhere you like (with the local constabulary permitting).

Plenty of Havok 2 physics are there to pretty up proceedings, along with realistically changing weather and day/night effects and beautiful scenery too. Even if you don't feel like playing the main game, there's plenty of fun to be had devising stupid stunts to show off with. Not as stupid as the name though, but what are you going to do, eh? PCZ

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER: Avalanche Studios
PUBLISHER: Eidos
WEBSITE: www.justcausegame.com
ETA: 2006

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- *GTA* meets *Far Cry* in South America
- Over 100 vehicles
- Parachutes!
- 1,225 square miles of island paradise – half the size of Jamaica

E3 2005 PART TWO



Those magnificent men in their flying machines.

Steam 'n' sorcery...

ON THE CD ON THE DVD

RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS



Steam-powered howitzers, glass-winged dragons and Da Vinci-inspired helicopters? *Sam Kieldsen* feels his sap rising...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Big Huge Games
PUBLISHER Microsoft Game Studios
WEBSITE www.riseoflegends.com
ETA Q2 2006

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- 'Sort of sequel' to *Rise Of Nations*
- Huge fantasy world setting
- Four unique nations
- Incredibly detailed graphics
- Fast-paced multiplayer mode

AS YOU might be able to work out from its full title (you clever bunch, you), *Rise Of Legends* is the new *Rise Of Nations* game. To call it a sequel, however, wouldn't be entirely accurate, because developer Big Huge Games is sending *Legends* in a slightly different direction, keeping the core gameplay much the same but ditching the real-world historical setting in favour of a fantasy realm called Aio. In the past, we've seen Ensemble Studios take the ever popular *Age Of Empires* series in a similar direction, following up the historical *Age Of Empires II* with the fantastical *Age Of Mythology*. So it's not like it's an unprecedented step.

MOANER LISA

As I write this, however, details of Big Huge Games' change of focus have only been available to the public for a matter of days, and already a vocal minority of *Rise Of Nations* devotees has whipped itself into bitching overdrive on fansite message boards. "All hope for the new *RON* is gone," wails one unhappy chappy, while others toss around words like 'disgrace' and 'horrible' with typical Internet fanboy abandon. And to think, we sometimes wonder why gaming is considered a geeky pastime.

But the whining brainiacs aren't as lucky as us: we actually got to see the game up close and personal at its pre-E3 unveiling event, and what we've seen is... well, it's pretty damn exciting. Big Huge Games president Brian Reynolds (who honed his skills working



CV

BIG HUGE GAMES

BIG HUGE GAMES

Founded in 2000 by four members of Sid Meier's Firaxis development house, this Baltimore-based company is still in its relative infancy. To date, Big Huge Games has only developed one full title: the ground-breaking RTS *Rise Of Nations* (released in 2003). The 35-strong team has also developed a *Rise Of Nations* expansion pack called *Thrones And Patriots*.



Industrial chic is where it's at.

alongside Sid Meier on the likes of *Civilization II* and *Alpha Centauri*), explains that Aio, rather than being your standard Tolkien-inspired swords 'n' sorcery world, is instead a place where semi-advanced technology exists alongside magic. There's not a goblin or pointy hat in sight.

THE DA VINCI CODERS

The single-player campaign sees you pulling on the fetching brown jacket of Giacomo, a fresh-faced inventor who winds up in charge of a city-state after his brother is mysteriously assassinated. This city is part of a faction called the Vinci, one of the two technology-focused nations that will appear in the game. With weapons and war machines inspired by the famous design sketches of (yep, you guessed it) Leonardo da Vinci, the Vinci is essentially a steampunk nation. Its cities are packed with the classic signs of industry: rotating cogs, glistening pipes, walkways and chimneys belching out clouds of smoke. A closer look reveals the tiny shapes of Vinci workers going about their daily grind. It's alluring stuff.

Another thing about *Rise Of Legends*' cities is that they aren't just a collection of buildings placed in close proximity to one another; they are single, monolithic entities. When constructing them, you'll be able to assign specialist districts (military, air force, science etc.) that are automatically added seamlessly to the existing structures. *Sim City* it ain't, but it should add another dimension to the game's visuals.

EYE CANDY

And goddamn it if this game doesn't look jaw-droppingly lovely. Our review of the original *Rise Of Nations* (*PC ZONE* 129, 90%) applauded Big Huge Games for the fact it had put gameplay before graphical willy waving. Well, now that the gameplay side of things has been sorted, the willies are coming out in force – and by golly, there's a lot of waving to be done. Reynolds tells us of his desire to create what he describes as "blistering white-hot graphics," the sort of earth-shattering, cataclysmic shit that goes down when powerful magic goes toe-to-toe with advanced technology.

Cities are just one aspect of it; the units are even more impressive. Giacomo, for instance, strides about atop a giant two-legged walker, stomping enemies into the dust. He's backed up by the likes of airships, clockwork tanks and helicopters with corkscrew rotor blades. Another nation Reynolds showed off is the Alim, a magic-based civilisation that takes its cue from *Arabian Nights*. So instead of tanks, robots and aircraft, an Alim general can call upon genies, sandstorms and giant scorpions. Two other nations will appear in the finished game (one magical, one technological), but Big Huge Games is





The Alim cities are characterised by glassy spires.

"Aio is a place where semi-advanced technology exists alongside magic – not a goblin or pointy hat in sight"

CULTURE CLASH



***Final Fantasy* – mixing styles like a mad thing.**

MAGIC AND MACHINERY IN GAMES

Original as *Rise Of Legends*' concept might seem, the idea of a technology-meets-magic background is not a particularly new one in the world of games. Troika Games' *Fallout*-esque *Arcanum* was located in a memorable world where flamethrowers, airships and steam trains co-existed with orcs, dwarfs and wizards. The setting alone made this flawed RPG worth a punt.

A less obscure example is the insanely successful *Final Fantasy VII*. Guns, motorcycles, trains (again), airships (again) and various other techy stuff was balanced by the use of stupidly big swords, magic armour and some guff about the 'lifestream.' Our memories of the game are rapidly fading into the mists of time, but the forthcoming *Advent Children* animated movie should bring them flooding back.

The uneasy mix of the supernatural and the scientific is also seen in several tabletop wargames, most notably *Warhammer*, where chivalric knights, elves, pikemen and griffons fight alongside steam-powered tanks and helicopters.

E3 2005 PART TWO



Real-time strategy has come a long way since *Command & Conquer*.



"Hurry! Ikea opens in five minutes!"

remaining tight-lipped with regards to names or details.

EVERY DOGE HAS HIS DAY

The first major adversary you'll face in the game is the Doge, a power-hungry rival within the Vinci nation. He uses similar troops and vehicles to those available to Giacomo, but has a couple of enormously nasty tricks up his sleeve, at least if the level we watched Reynolds play through is anything to go by. First up was a gigantic mobile cannon that pelted our home city with huge shells from afar. Reynolds sent a fleet of bombers to destroy it, and the physics were demonstrated nicely as the massive barrel of the now defunct howitzer pitched over a cliff. (Incidentally, all the troops in the game will ragdoll when blown up, and can be crushed by falling buildings.)

The second surprise was a terrifying mechanical spider. This giant steel beast ploughed through Giacomo's Alim allies like a hot knife through butter, slaying dozens of units in seconds. A manic glint in his eye, Reynolds brings out the Alim big guns: a pair of soaring glass-winged dragons, which proceed to give the mecha-arachnid the sort of roasting that'd put a Premiership footballer to shame. Job done. Demo over.



COMMAND AND CONQUER

Gameplay-wise, *Rise Of Legends* looks likely to pick up where its predecessor left off: the aim is essentially to conquer the world using a turn-based macro-level mode (played out on a gloriously detailed map) backed up by the main real-time mode. Resource management will once more play a part – we've seen both gold and a substance called Timonium so far – but as you can see from the screenshots, the lie of the land in the latter mode is no longer flat; this will surely impact on the way you play the game.

We can't sign off without mentioning the plans for *Rise Of Legends*' multiplayer mode. Reynolds quips that if the fast-paced multiplayer offered by *Rise Of Nations* was "history on your lunch hour," then what you get from *Rise Of Legends* is "fantasy on your coffee break." It's going to be even quicker, letting you get down to the nitty-gritty of fighting, spellcasting and so on in minutes, rather than forcing you to spend hours laboriously constructing bases and researching technologies.

All in all, it's fair to say that we haven't been so excited about a strategy game since the first *Age Of Empires III* screenshots saw the light of day. And with almost a year of development time left, it can only get better. PCZ

Why Don't You?...

PUT THE 'S' IN RTS

We've only seen a small snapshot of what *Rise Of Legends* has to offer so far, so it's difficult to start chucking weird and wonderful suggestions at Big Huge Games. One thing we certainly want to see is combat that actually feels strategic – something that's all too rare in RTS games. Tank rushes – even if the tanks are actually overweight genies or giant scorpions – are no fun at all. We're dying to see combat that takes factors such as the height of the terrain into account, that requires combined arms, and that rewards tactical thinking. Is that too much to ask for? It's also fair to say that we'd rather not have to spend hours tediously micromanaging units to collect and generate resources, but we reckon Big Huge Games could be on top of this already.



Big Huge Games hints that *Rise Of Legends* could become a series.



The opening ceremony for the Beijing Olympics was shaping up well.

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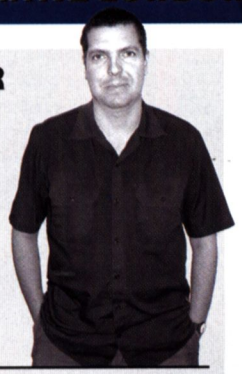
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REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

SUMMER LOVIN'



■ **ACTING EDITOR** Jamie Sefton

It's summer – I can tell, because I'm sitting in a stiflingly hot office, and the only air-conditioning is Will wafting us with an improvised fan sellotaped together from old copies of *PC ZONE*. Traditionally when the sun comes out, the games releases dry up, but this June we have two of the year's biggest new PC titles hitting the shops.

We kick off with the exclusive review of *Battlefield 2*, the hugely anticipated sequel to *Battlefield: Vietnam*, and the first to include all the latest essential next-gen nick-nacks such as cool lighting and ragdoll physics. I'm pleased to say it's as good as it looked at last year's E3 videogames show, when after seeing a 20-minute demo, myself and Woods immediately signed it up as a *PC ZONE* exclusive. Unfortunately EA just missed our deadline to get the playable demo on this month's discs, but we will have it next month. In the meantime you can read Richie's definitive verdict beginning on page 70.

Our other big summer smash is Rockstar's *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, already a massive hit (and run) on PS2 and finally here to thrash on PC (page 76). When I recently visited Rockstar to play the preview code, I was very interested in the fact that the company is a big supporter of the *Multi-Theft Auto* modders, and didn't rule out working with them in the future. Let's hope that for the next *GTA*, we'll have fully supported multi-player, with huge turf wars between rival clan gangs fought out online.

We've also got reviews of the conspiracy shooter *Area 51* (page 88), role-playing beard 'em up *Dungeon Lords* (page 80), ambitious *Far Cry*-esque FPS *Boiling Point* (page 82) and tongue-in-cheek remake *The Bard's Tale* (page 84). A special mention must go to Ubisoft for the most uninspiring name for an expansion disk ever – *The Settlers: Heritage of Kings Expansion Disk* (page 87). And who says the games industry has no imagination nowadays?



***Battlefield 2*: the mighty online behemoth's victorious return.**

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly games publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic (see below). Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release, so no game is judged in isolation. We also make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Will loose on *FIFA Football 2005*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make, please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND MULTIPLAYER UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale and if there are no public servers running before we go to print, we won't second-guess how the game's going to play online. Instead, you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Online Zone section.

Online Zone is also the place where we review online-only games, mods and major updates of online games. Between the two sections, we've got every gaming angle covered!

OUR PCS

We test games on a variety of systems so we can report how they perform in the real world. All our reviewed games are played on the manufacturer's minimum specification, as well as our own top-end rig – the Area-51 from Alienware (below).



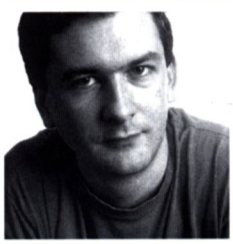


Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



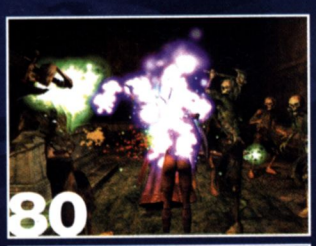
The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

MEET THE TEAM





QUESTIONS	DAVE WOODS	JAMIE SEFTON
1. What are you playing?	*PES4, Online Poker*	*PES4, Stronghold 2*
2. What is your role in the battlefield of life?	Deserter	Armchair general



DUNGEON LORDS
Slash a goblin today



SINGLES 2
Two girls, one bloke. Perfect?



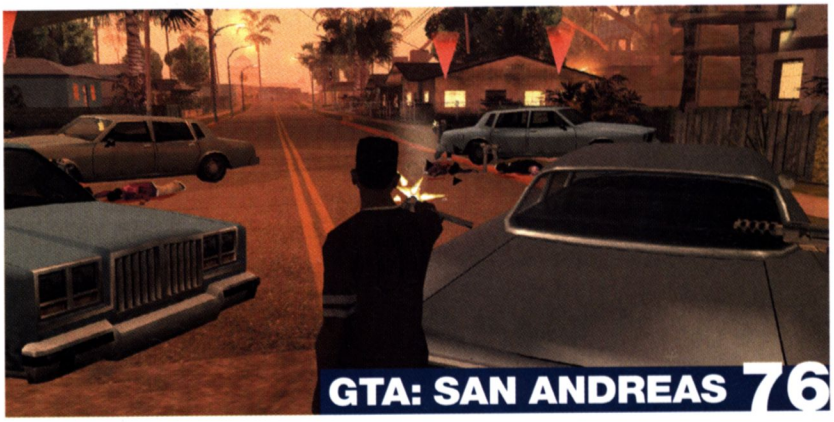
INDIE ZONE
Independent developers' wares



REPLAY
Cheap games for paupers

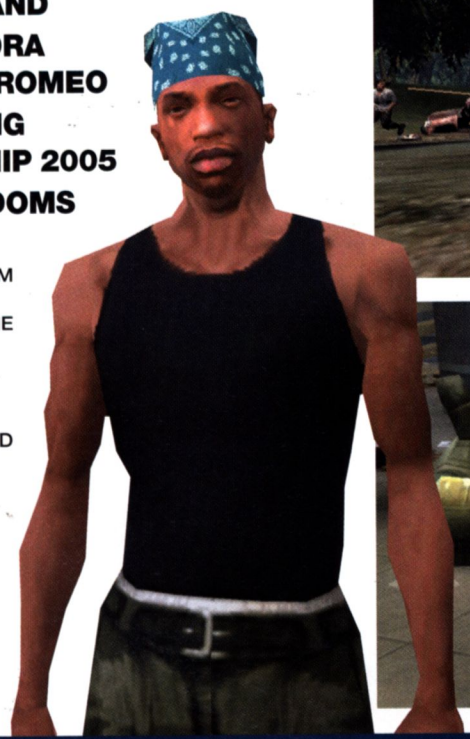
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SPEAK YOUR BRAINS ON THE LATEST GAMES











PAUL PRESLEY
Guild Wars, Phantasy Star Online Blue Burst
In-bedded reporter



WILL PORTER
Boiling Point, PES4
Standing in a hail of bullets trying to work out how to take the safety catch off



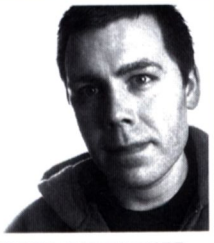
SAM KIELDSEN
SWAT 4, GTA: San Andreas
Freelance mercenary. I turn up late and loot the place for free gaming



SUZY WALLACE
Guild Wars, Far Cry
Shouting and swearing from the back line. It's all for team morale, you know



STEVE HILL
Football Manager 2005, Championship Manager Online
Conscientious objector



RICHIE SHOEMAKER
Battlefield 2, followed by more *Battlefield 2*
Prisoner of war



Tanks – not the most practical of melee weapons.

BATTLEFIELD 2

■ £34.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: Digital Illusions | ETA: June 24
www.battlefield2.com

REQUIRES P4 1.7GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card and an ADSL/cable modem
DESIRES P4 2.4GHz, 1GB RAM, 256MB 3D card and a T1/LAN Internet connection

PC ZONE CLASSIC

Finally the *Battlefield* series lands its troops in the modern era. First to fight: *Richie Shoemaker*

IT IS MY solemn duty to report that the time has come. If you have a copy of *Battlefield 1942*, it's time to pack it away. It's obsolete, redundant; its services are no longer required. Play it one last time if you must and savour the memories; of bloody victories fought over sod and ruin, the comrades lost in courageous assaults and the calluses that forever fused index finger to mouse. Yes, be mournful of its passing, but be thankful that its spirit lives on.

OK, OK, a bit too melodramatic I know, but during the few hours of



When architectural criticism goes bad.

INPERSPECTIVE

JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING
Reviewed Issue 145, Score 83%
Novalogic was the first to bring the *Battlefield*-style of combat into the modern era, and by focusing more on infantry skirmishing, it was a successful attempt. Despite the 100-plus player maps though, you can expect the game to fall back into the shadows.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004
Reviewed Issue 138, Score 91%
For fear of sounding like a stuck record, if setting is less important than fast, furious gameplay with guns and vehicles, there remains little to challenge the mighty *UT*'s Conquest mode – for the time being at least.



"I can't ride in the back, I'll get car... er, air sick."



Traffic calming measures, Iraq-style.



Jaywalkers suffer the ultimate in fines.

downtime before I sat down to write this review, I realised that *Battlefield 1942* would soon be departing my hard drive after three years of distinguished service. Eyes clouding over with nostalgia, I was genuinely moved to fire up Digital Illusions' ground-breaking shooter one last time, smiling with genuine endearment at the still inane displays of so-called intelligence on the part of the computer-controlled combatants. Gawd bless 'em.

Fear not though, because the future looks bright. Treated to one of the most frantic and exciting intro movies ever inserted into a game, and given the sheer breadth of new features and the near-future setting, it's surprising how quickly you settle into *Battlefield 2*'s new surroundings.

SAME AS IT EVER WAS

The interface has barely changed: movement, shifting through the weapons, finding and driving the various vehicles is exactly how you expect it to be, but better. On foot, movement seemed to overcompensate for your actions in previous games, but here turning, advancing and strafing seems far more natural – more how it should be. Break cover and double tap on the forward key and you lurch into a sprint, stamina bar depleting as you near your destination. Jump and your stamina falls further, so you dive behind a bush to catch your breath, waiting for the next dash to take the enemy position.

Going back to *'42* or *'Nam*, you realise how basic the first-person shooter component of each game was. Here, you can avoid vehicles completely (although the occasional lift to the front line will always be welcome) and have just as much fun as those who prefer not to stretch their virtual legs.

"Going back to *'42* or *'Nam*, you realise how basic the FPS component of each game was"



As always, James Bond's vehicles had a bevy of optional gadgets fitted.

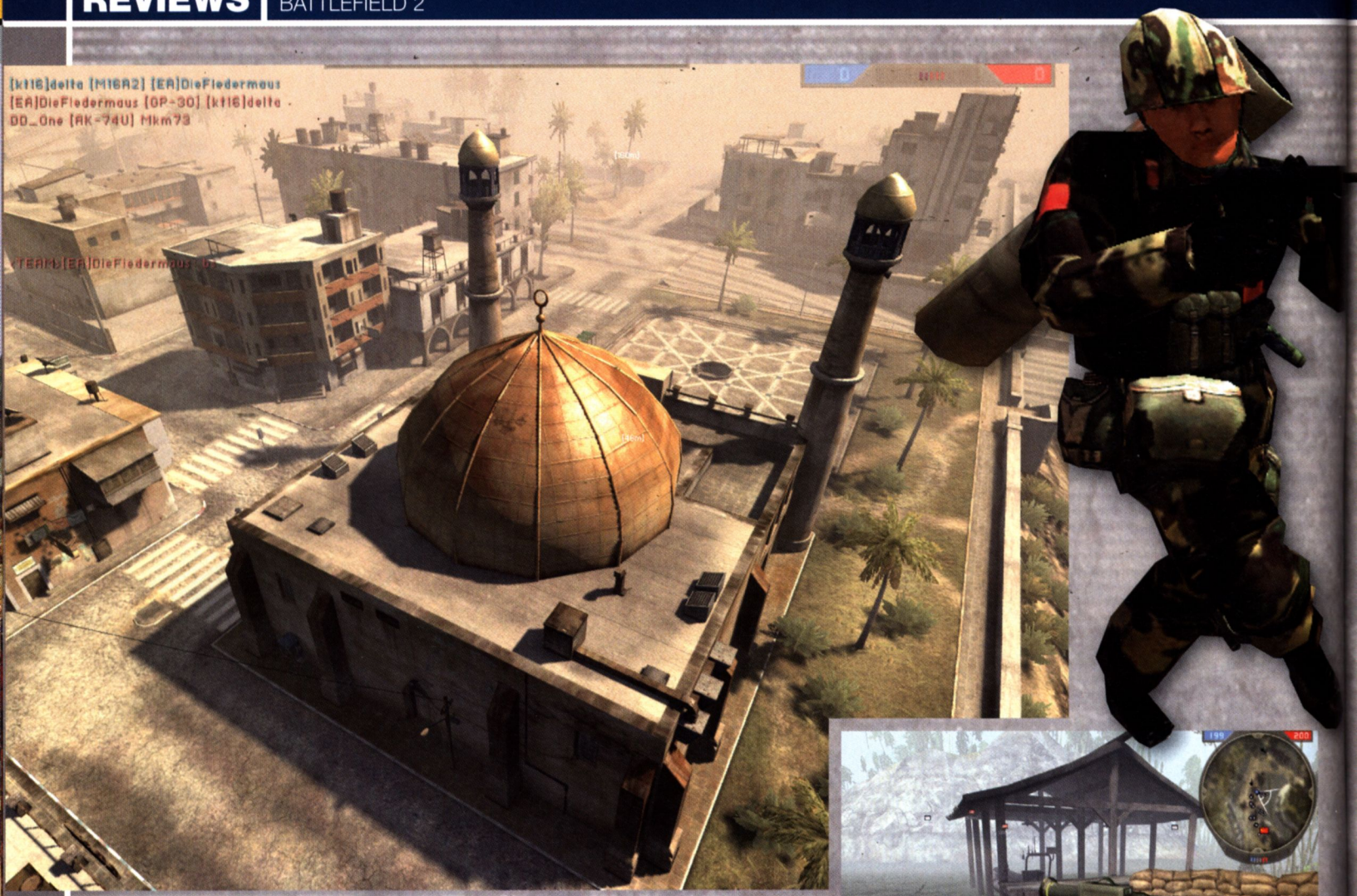
GOING UNDERGROUND

BF2's maps are far more diverse and dynamic than its predecessors'. Buildings that were little more than shacks are now fully realised structures of stone and plaster. True, they're not quite as intense as in *Counter-Strike*, or as sinuous as *PlanetSide*'s innards perhaps, but there are enough places to avoid mechanised warfare and indulge in more traditional means of FPS death dealing here.

Sewers wind underneath bases enabling Special Forces to creep about without fear of being intercepted by missiles. Tall cranes peer across oil refineries, affording incredible views for snipers to bead over. Outside, maps are littered with pipes, crates, horse carts and other detritus, some of it easily destroyed, most of it frustratingly permanent. The upshot of all this is that infantry firefights are a driving focus of each game and when a tank does appear, avoiding its gaze (and slapping a satchel charge on it) is very much easier.

That's not to infer tanks and other such methods of conveyance are in any way obsolete (this time around grenades are strictly for soft targets). After all, it's that very mix of first-person action and vehicular combat that makes *Battlefield* the series it is. Fast buggies, APCs, M1 tanks, choppers and jet fighters are all faithfully represented and are quickly settled into should you already be accustomed to their forebears from *BF: Vietnam*.

Unfortunately, there are no artillery units this time. While I appreciate that such pieces were often sequestered as second-class tanks, their presence behind the front line was more than decisive in battles I've been party to. Thankfully though, instead of doing away with artillery strikes



Now that's a very shiny dome.



altogether, control over static heavy guns is placed entirely in the hands of the battlefield commander, a role that prior *Battlefield* games have sorely lacked. The commander is now a central figure of any side that professes to employ teamwork in order to rise above the other.

PLAY NATION

This time around there are three combating nations to side with: the US (Marine Corps), the Chinese People's Liberation Army and the fictional Middle Eastern Coalition, who, for the sake of gameplay, are remarkably well equipped.

Despite the near-future backdrop however, the developer has opted not to linger on desperate political events in and around the Gulf, instead setting battles as far apart as Northern China, the Red Sea and Oman. There's no mention of Iraq, but you may assume otherwise given the woolly descriptions of some of the locales. Perhaps intentionally, all the battles seem to involve securing oil fields rather than caches of biological weapons.

Each side boasts the familiar mix of vehicles and weapon types, with the Chinese and MEC offering a similar range of technology. In terms of effectiveness though, weapons are by and large identical between nations, with the US boasting perhaps greater air superiority, the MEC the larger number of fast ground-attack vehicles. In the main, there's little to choose between them save for the voices that blare out from your speakers.



"I thought you said you knew how to fly?"

CLASS WAR

Whatever side you do choose, the most important decision prior to any game is which equipment to place about your person. In place of the Scout kit is the sniper, and while he can no longer spot targets for distant artillery, he does now have a cache of anti-personal Claymore mines instead. Sniping is a popular and effective role for obvious reasons, but even with larger maps and the aforementioned vantage points, their lethality is tempered by the improved effectiveness of medics. These health angels are now able to equip shock paddles that can quickly bring a fallen comrade to full health and heal the injured without needing to actively 'use' medical kits.

GIS A JOB

Similarly, engineers can repair nearby vehicles automatically, and can do so while aboard a vehicle of their own. Such abilities not only make the engineer a natural choice for drivers, but also foster teamwork between mechanised units as two tanks driven by engineers can – forgive the pun – tank each other until overcome. Being one of my favourite player-class types from previous games, I'm pleased at their new abilities, if a little disappointed that their main weapons are largely useless.

ADVANCED WARS



Your service record will be online for all to see.

ARE YOU EXPERIENCED? YOU WILL BE

In a non-commissioned role you aren't forced to follow orders – there are no latrines to slop out while waiting for the next level to load – but there are incentives to barking out a 'Yessir' whenever your democratically elected superior paints a new objective on your minimap. As a player you're ranked for every kill, capture or assist you take part in (although only on ranked servers). Accuracy with each weapon, effectiveness with each kit and more general attributes like teamwork, combat and command are also rated. Rise up through the ranks in any discipline and – as well as unlocking new weapons – you're more likely to be accepted in your chosen role. And while having a low teamwork rating in relation to your overall experience won't get you excluded from games, you're going to have to put aside selfish tendencies if you want to enjoy the rewards of the full *Battlefield* experience.





Loading pallets – the new exploding barrels.

Moving along, the assault trooper no longer has a heavy machine gun, instead favouring an under-slung grenade launcher alongside a more traditional assault rifle. Meanwhile, the support variant – one of two new classes – acquires the big gun and the ability to re-arm nearby troops in the same way that the medic heals and the engineer repairs. All of which leaves the anti-tank specialist and the other new player class, the special forces operative. The latter is my current favourite, who may perhaps not have the most powerful weapon in the game, but can set satchel charges to destroy (some) bridges, blow holes in (some) walls and destroy (most) weapon emplacements.

LEAD FROM BEHIND

The biggest change to the dynamic of the arcade war that *BF2* preaches is the presence of the aforementioned commander, a role selected by popular vote rather than by choosing a kitbag. As we all know, being in charge is a thankless task, more so here as players are free to disregard your orders. Plus, should you fail, demotion to the lower ranks is consequently swift. But with a good leader, games can be every bit as intense as any team-orientated shooter we've played – *PlanetSide*, *Savage* or *WWII Online* among them.

Your companion is your overview map, where you can zoom in, call barrages (that's if the enemy haven't sabotaged your howitzers), send out remote spy drones, scan the map or drop supplies.

Despite such high-tech tools, the most decisive is the commander's ability to detect the enemy and direct his troops to deal with them. It's a fiddly interface for sure, but to master it is surely the point of aspiring to take the lead. Zoom in on a part of the top-down map and enemy vehicles are instantly revealed. However, you must quickly relay what you see to your squads (right click, unit spotted, at which point it's briefly highlighted on everyone's battle map), and should you linger too long on one part of the map, you may miss what may be happening in other areas. In addition, let's not forget that as commander, you have a physical presence on the battlefield. This means that even if you happen to be far from the front line hiding under a building, you can still expect to be discovered and a team of special ops or high explosive shells sent your way. Despite being the embodiment of teamplay, it's amazing how much of the game as commander is spent alone.

HOT BOTS OR NOT?

Which leads us neatly onto the single-player game, which is in many respects a massive improvement over both *1942*





OK, who invited the Wookiee?





Damn, too much lighter fluid on the barbeque.

and *Vietnam*. First and foremost the AI. If you happen to be wounded and request assistance, a nearby medic will head for your position, as they will with defibrillators should you be in danger of breathing your last. Similarly, engineers and support troops will make good any repairs and ply you with ammo if requested. They won't go on suicidal runs to save you if they're under fire, which is fair enough, but they will go out of their way (more so than human players) to ensure you stay active on the field.

AI IS A1

Another bonus where the AI's concerned is that if a transport whizzes by and you need a lift to the front line, ask them to stop and they generally do. Well, not every time, but enough for you to cast a verbal 'thanks chief' their way whenever they're courteous enough to offer a seat. And while talking to bots is not something I'm proud of, I'm man enough to show appreciation even if it's unlikely to carry favour in future encounters.

The bots are less adept at driving though, and while they aren't as imbecilic as they were in the initial release of *1942* (who were impossibly good shots as well, remember), there's the odd instance of veering off a road in a vain attempt to ride a tank up a sheer slope. Such an instance led me to take charge just in case the AI driver decided get creative. Much better is their command of the skies, which isn't so surprising given the lack of obstacles. However, you can be confident that should you wish to man the wire-guided missiles on an Apache, your pilot will be fairly competent at keeping you aloft. Even the AI commander is surprisingly proficient.

No, this time the AI isn't a problem. This time it's the lack of options for single-players. You see, in the multiplayer game there are essentially 36 maps – 16, 32 and 64-player variants of the 12-map basic set. In single-player there are just ten of the 16-player versions. They're clearly designed to give instant gratification, something they accomplish well enough (I played them for three days solid and didn't get bored). However, training yourself in the fine art of captaincy is not easily done here and you cannot customise the AI settings or enjoy 32- or 64-player offline games.

ALL TO FIGHT FOR

The developer has always insisted the single-player game was a tutorial for the multiplayer game, but as improved as the AI is, there's no substitute for human interaction. At the time of

THREE SIZES FIT ALL

SMALL, MEDIUM OR LARGE – THAT'S 16, 32 OR 64 TO YOU AND ME



Three points for 16 players.



Now things are getting complicated.



Welcome to the air force and the navy.

Back when plans for *Battlefield 2* were being drawn up, someone who'd clearly been at the Ryvita dreamt up the idea of having dynamic maps that changed in size as people logged in and out. After some prototype testing, it was deemed that to have portions of the map disappearing willy-nilly would be rather disconcerting, to say the least. Instead, it seemed easier to create three variations of each map, one for 16-player limits (for those with bog-standard broadband connections), 32-players (1MB+) and 64-players (for those with Wandy-style neural links).

The result is rather pleasing, because as you migrate through the maps, a degree of familiarity aids the otherwise disorientating feeling you get when arriving in a large unknown place. Effectively, the smaller maps centre on the core battles, with the larger variants bringing in new control points from the periphery, some extending out to sea and including carriers loaded with choppers, aircraft and assault boats. However, the very bestest thing about the larger maps is that you can fly in a straight line. Remember in *Battlefield 1942* where you'd level off in your Mustang, only to find yourself veering off the map and being shot down for desertion? Here, despite the increase in speed that modern jet engines afford, prolonged dogfights are very much part of the experience – so long as you can keep those Sidewinders off your tail.



SECOND OPINION



BRIGADIER PREZZLEWICK

The most striking thing was how quickly I felt at home in *BF2*, despite all the new game mechanics. *BF2* is the same experience but with nicer graphics and improved tactics. No bad thing, since the *BF* series has always been the best online shooter going. The command modes take some getting used to and offline training options would have been welcome. Plus, the order interface needs tightening up – it doesn't work as fluidly as it could, but given time you'll adjust. The best thing is how much it encourages teamwork and rewards your time online with bonuses and global rankings. Most online shooters are fine in the moment, but only *BF2* keeps you feeling rewarded long after the fighting is over.



SPAWN STAR

RUNNING TO THE FRONT LINE IS A THING OF THE PAST

Should you choose to join a squad – which you should, by the way – your squad leader becomes a mobile spawn point, allowing you to get back into battle nearer your team-mates. Moreover, the squad leader is the only person in direct voice contact with the commander, as you can only communicate vocally with your squad members. It's an elegant system, although we can't help but fear that teams will revert back to using third-party apps to circumvent *BF2*'s seemingly inflexible voice chat function.



Finally, medics can feel like useful members of society.



This'll make the school run a bit easier in the morning.

Whereas *BF1942* had to cater – albeit unsuccessfully, it must be said – to those still encumbered with squealing 56k modems, *Battlefield 2* is unrepentant in indulging the broadband generation to the exclusion of those hamstrung by such ancient devices. In short, you need a heavyweight PC and a lightning-fast connection to enjoy *BF2* to its fullest, yet enjoy it to its fullest you must.

COMBAT EVOLVED

Graphically it's stunning to behold, geographically vast to explore and whereas the first two games in the series were typified by anarchic rushes for armour, *BF2* promotes and rewards altruism and teamwork like no other. There's room for lone wolf heroes and selfish cowardice still, but if you enlist to fight across *Battlefield 2's* near-future hotspots, know that you must relent to being part of a cohesive force of unified aim.

BF1942 was a training tool for the virtual battlefield, a place to learn weapon craft, tactics and how to drive a truck. *Battlefield 2* adds the tools for command to the mix, and to ignore them is to spit in face of its lofty ambition.

It's all fantastic news for fans – DICE's latest multiplayer shooter is exactly the experience we all wanted. Of course, you don't really have to uninstall *BF1942*, but I warn you now, as soon as you've experienced its successor, you won't be looking back. PZ

"*BF2* is graphically stunning, geographically vast and rewards teamwork to the max"

writing there remains a certain amount of acclimatisation going on across public servers – a period of intense learning. Understandably, players are rushing to try out the vehicles, trying to pull off defib kills, standing on runways with anti-tank weapons, haring off in buggies to capture points solo – all things that they should be doing offline and all things they did when *BF1942* first arrived.

However, as soon as everyone understands the need to communicate and follow orders, the experience will undoubtedly improve. The in-built voice chat system is helping – the fact that you can only communicate with your squad means that tight relationships are already forming between players. In a few short weeks, there should be enough veterans leading the way to keep the loud-mouthed recruits in check.

As much as war has changed in the 60 years that separate the settings of the two *Battlefield* games (*Vietnam* being a sideshow, metaphorically), online combat has changed almost as dramatically in the three gaming years that separate *1942* from this.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Modern multiplayer combat on a massive scale
- ✔ Persistent ranking and command options
- ✔ Graphics on a par with any offline shooter
- ✔ Vast maps, new player classes and countless control improvements
- ✘ Massively improved AI, but not to *UT* standard quite yet
- ✘ Mainly cosmetic differences between the three sides

94

The future of multiplayer combat is here

GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

■ Price: £34.99 | Pub: Rockstar Games | Dev: Rockstar North | ETA: Out Now | www.rockstargames.com/sanandreas

REQUIRES: Pentium III 1GHz, 256MB RAM, a 64MB 3D card and an 8x DVD drive **DESIRES:** Pentium 4 2GHz, 384MB RAM, a 128MB 3D card and a 16x DVD drive

***Sam Kieldsen* crip-walks over to his computer desk and keeps it gangsta. After checking his emails**







Ooh, naughty. He's not wearing a helmet.



He needs a spokey-dokey badly.



INPERSPECTIVE

DRIV3R
Reviewed Issue 155, Score 59%
While not as bad as some might have you believe, *Driv3r*'s unforgiving nature and technical problems mean that this one is probably b3st l3ft w3ll alon3.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY
Reviewed Issue 131, Score 95%
A fantastic game when released, but it's now somewhat inferior to *San Andreas* (except for the soundtrack, possibly).

AS PROUD PC gamers, you may feel a little aggrieved to be reading this review now, rather than nine months ago when this game first reared its tabloid-baiting head on the PlayStation 2. I myself crumbled in typical lily-livered fashion, holding out until around last Christmas, at which time I decided that I couldn't wait another half a year for a game that all and sundry were raving about. And I had a blast with the PS2 version. I really did. But now I wish I'd had the patience to wait that half a year, because after spending time with this version I'd much rather be playing *San Andreas* through for the first time on my PC.

Unless you've been squatting in a Saddam-style hidey-hole for the past ten years, I'm going to assume you know what the *GTA* games are all about. But here are the revision notes for anyone who may have recently awoken from a coma: you're a career criminal in a fictional city (although one that's clearly inspired by a real-life metropolis) filled with people and vehicles, any of which you can kill/drive (delete as appropriate). You have the option of undertaking missions – some of which keep the story ticking along, some of which don't – but you are also free to roam around the city if you wish; the game world is very much your oyster. Embark on the sort of whore-murdering rampage that recently got Hillary Clinton's knickers in a public twist, or simply cruise around town looking cool – the choice is yours.

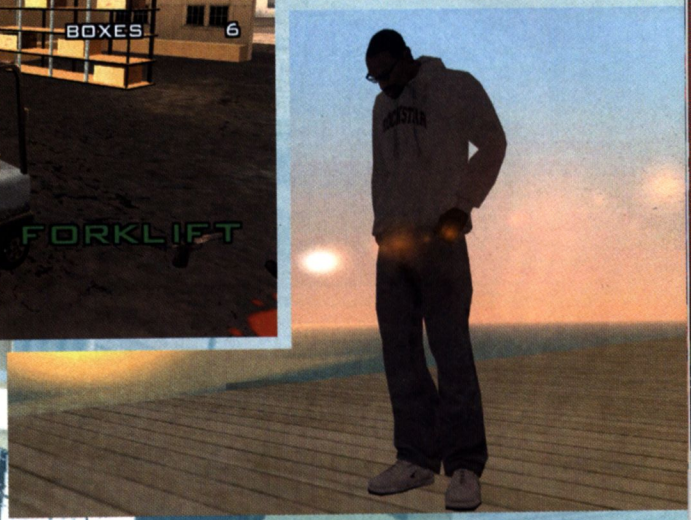
CALIFORNIA LOVE

Rockstar North's latest sticks closely to the formula. The main





One ride, pre-pimping.



"Oh, pine!"



"Excuse me, chaps. Do you know where the picnic area is?"

"Instead of a single city, you get a whole state in which to indulge your gangsta leanings. Inspired by California, the game world is huge"

departure is that instead of being given the freedom to roam around a single city, you get a whole state in which to indulge your gangsta leanings. Inspired by California (and a certain neon-lit corner of Nevada), the game world is huge. Fully five times bigger than *Vice City*, it's home to three cities and numerous small towns, with plenty of redneck-packed, hillbilly countryside in between.

But as with other *GTA* titles, you can't see everything right from the start. Wisely, Rockstar feeds you fresh slices of San Andreas as you advance through the game's story, opening up routes to new areas as you progress. The plot is pretty much thus: it's the early 1990s, and you're Carl 'CJ' Johnson, a Los Santos native who's spent the past few years thugging it up out of state. Dragged back to the 'hood by the death of your mother, you start running with your old homies once more. It's not the most interesting of hooks – although there's a pleasing amount of backstabbing, betrayal and brotherly love thrown in – but it works, and the promise of new areas to explore helps drive you on.

MENACE II SOCIETY

The core gameplay has changed hardly at all from *Vice City*. A typical mission might see you tasked with beating up a drug dealer. So you jump in a car, burn it round to the crack den and proceed to knock seven shades of shit out of your target with the baseball bat you looted from the corpse of an earlier victim. Other mission types include illegal street races, heists and lowrider bouncing contests.

But if you're thinking that this is simply a rehash of earlier *GTA* games with a bigger map, think again. *San Andreas* adds an incredible amount to this core gameplay, and it makes the game feel even vaster. For instance, CJ can get tattooed, have a haircut, bulk up in the gym and buy clothes. Hell, you can even trick out your ride in several garages dotted around the map. None of this is purely cosmetic: changing your appearance gets the cops off your back, while weightlifting increases the amount of damage you deal in a fight. We



Cruisin' for a bruisin' – especially with the LSPD nearby.

haven't even mentioned the numerous girlfriends you can squire, the burglaries, the fat stat or the properties available for purchase. There's a mind-boggling amount of stuff to do.

ROLE WITH IT

Other additions include RPG-style skills, which become improved through practice: bump up your rifle skill and shooting becomes sharper; increase your motorcycling proficiency and you won't tumble off as often. Another important stat is 'Respect', which rises as you plough through missions. The higher it is, the more gang members you can entice into your entourage.

San Andreas has a turf war system that requires you to grab rival gangs' territory and claim it as your own. Any areas you control will be populated by recruitable thugs who follow you around, attacking enemies and performing drive-bys. While not the best fighters, they do provide a welcome extra dimension to *GTA*'s combat.

Ah, combat. This brings me nicely to the point I touched on earlier. Like I said, I wish I'd waited for this version of *San Andreas* before picking up my digital Glock and embarking on a pixellated life of crime, as the newly arrived PC version is better than the PS2 version in a couple of significant ways.

Thanks to the mouse and keyboard combo, combat is vastly improved. You can actually manually aim the guns accurately and quickly, which is nigh-on impossible to do on the PlayStation 2. Gunfights are more tactile, enjoyable and far, far less frustrating. Then there's the visual side of things.

OH YOU PRETTY THING

You can probably tell from the screenshots that *San Andreas* is not particularly impressive when compared to the likes of *Half-Life 2* – most of the textures are blurred and fuzzy, and none of the latest graphical effects have been implemented. But it's still far superior to the PS2 version: the draw distance is further, the frame-rate is better and the resolution is higher. Real-time shadows replace indistinct blobs. All told it's a smoother, slicker-looking game.

Rockstar has also thrown in some new features for the PC. Photos and stats can be exported, there's a 30-second replay function, and should you get bored of the ludicrously fantastic soundtrack and fancy yourself as a bit of a Dave Lee Travis, you can create your own radio station using MP3s. Commercials are even spliced in between tracks to create a more authentic feel, and the game is now moddable – something that will open things out even more.

One thing that's missing is the co-operative two-player mode of the PS2 version, which Rockstar claims wouldn't work given the PC's control options. Debatable perhaps, but it was a pretty insignificant part of the game to begin with, so it won't be missed too strongly.

So has *San Andreas* on PC been worth the wait? Well, yes, quite frankly: it's a marked improvement on what was already a bloody brilliant game. If you've played through the PlayStation 2 version then we wouldn't suggest spunking another 35 notes on it, but if you've been more patient than stupid old me, go out, buy it and play on, playa. PCZ

ACTING UP

ROCKSTAR HITS ITS VOICE ACTING MARKS AGAIN

Let's face it: for the most part, voice acting in games is pitiful. Whether it's due to the quality of the actors (if you can call them actors), or simply the amateurish directing, it's a fact. Thank god, then, for games like *GTA: San Andreas*. Rockstar might have the sort of budget that sends most developers greener than a leprechaun on St Patrick's Day, but it also knows how to use it. We're willing to bet that a big slice went on hiring some real talent to provide the voices.

San Andreas' cast boasts such stellar names as Samuel L Jackson, James Woods and Peter Fonda. Then there's support from the ever-reliable likes of Chris Penn and Frank Vincent, while Danny Dyer and Bill Fichtner reprise their roles from *Vice City*. Fittingly, the cast also features a slew of West Coast hip-hop stars, all the way from the old school (MC Eiht, Ice T) to the new breed (The Game). And nobody does a bad job. Look to Rockstar, developers, and take a lesson in how to produce voice acting that won't have us reaching for the mute button.

AIR ON A G-THANG

COME FLY WITH CJ...

Where *Vice City* had a handful of flyable aircraft, *San Andreas* has tons. Later on in the game you can obtain your own desert airfield (complete with hangar), and a pilot's licence that grants you access to the cities' airports, where you can hop aboard the likes of private jets, choppers and World War II-era fighter planes. Look further afield and you'll find heavily armed military jets and helicopter gunships.



Gives *Microsoft Flight Sim* a run for its money.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Massive game world
- ✔ So much stuff to do
- ✔ Some improvements over the PS2 version
- ✔ Top-notch soundtrack and voice acting
- ✘ Graphics engine showing its age
- ✘ No two-player mode

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Smooth criminal

RollerCoaster TYCOON 3

Soaked!

Wetter...
Swirl, splash and stir your guests. Knock them off their feet with water cannons. Fill them with fear on the giant inter-connecting flumes. Send them flying off the highest diving boards and see them belly flop into the pool. Make the biggest splash and get them all Soaked!

Faster...
Hit the rails. Ride the flumes. Escape the rapids. Feel the surf. Build the fastest and biggest water rides and slides. Watch the riders as their knuckles turn white. Then plunge your coasters through thrilling tunnels, and explore amazing underwater walkways.

Hotter...
Get your guests out of their clothes and into their bikinis. Watch them swim and sunbathe or entertain them with the laser and water shows. Shock them with the trained killer whale. Then amaze them with a hot new VIP and entertainer.

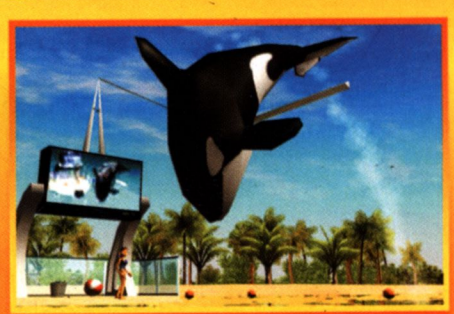
Further
Get your hands on the all-new coasters and rides and take that extra step by exploring the fantastic new scenery themes: Atlantis, an underwater fantasy kingdom; Paradise Island where you can watch the hula girls until the sun goes down.

Richer...
Get your guests spending their cash and start bathing in money. Sell sunglasses, locker rentals sunscreen and surf boards. With more retail opportunities you'll experience the stress of a real tycoon.

BIGGER. BETTER. WETTER.









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FRONTIER

ATARI

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The Elven Trials can be really tough.





The first all-skeleton boy band practice their moves.

DUNGEON LORDS



■ Price: £29.99 | Pub: DreamCatcher | Dev: Heuristic Park | ETA: Out Now | www.dungeonlordsgame.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 64MB RAM and a 64MB DirectX7 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB DirectX9 3D card

Having never owned a dungeon nor been a lord, who better than *Suzy Wallace* to review this RPG?

"A HOLIDAY to America, a bunch of DVDs and some new clothes." These are the items going through my brain as I try to think of what I could buy should I pursue a claim of work-related injury. Not because I've injured my back picking up heavy magazines, but because I've spent the last five hours on one quest and the sheer number of foes I'm up against has meant that I can feel the first twinges of RSI coming on from the non-stop clicking.

Dungeon Lords takes its cue from RPG classics such as *Diablo* and *Gothic II*, with the primary slant of the game being focused around fast-paced action, something it delivers in bundles. Right from the off, you're faced with assorted groups of nasties looking to ruin your day, and the pace rarely abates thanks to the miracle of spawning mobs. Thankfully though, the addition of rolls and dodges to your combat repertoire serve to elevate things beyond the usual button-mashing frenzy.

Character progression is impressive and spans the entirety of the title, enabling you to specialise in your chosen profession at the various guilds that you're a member of. As well as offering various stat and ability upgrades, the titles available are nicely varied too, from standard Enchantress to über-cool must-have Ninja Lord.

UNFINISHED WORK

The gameworld itself features plenty of main quests and with a healthy dollop of mini-quests being dished out at your local guild too, there's enough to keep you going for around 40-50 hours. And if you're still finding it a bit tough on your own, there's always the opportunity to bring in some of your mates to give you a helping hand in the multiplayer co-op mode.

However, there's one thing that really stands out about *Dungeon Lords* and that's its ability to make you feel like a beta tester: simply put, this game has a quite astonishing list of issues. Rather than trying to impress the sheer number upon you, here are some of the more pressing ones we noticed...

The first sin is that there's no map function (despite the manual and the tutorial stating to the contrary). What's more, the all-essential RPG staple of character customisation doesn't work, you have to exit to the main menu to load a saved game and magic users are woefully under-balanced. Plus, some quests are broken/convoluted/ridiculously difficult; most dwellings contain no furniture and only the initial city has any wandering NPCs, making most cities feel like ghost towns. Also, the game stutters whenever a new mob is spawned, plus some skills and spells simply don't work.

However, these are just the tip of the iceberg – if you really want to indulge in a spot of sadism, I'm sure you'll find plenty more by patrolling the forums. The title simply appears to have been rushed out without any testing, which is a real shame because underneath its problems, *Dungeon Lords* is a solid and enjoyable, if not ground-breaking RPG.

If DreamCatcher manages to pull its socks up and releases a slew of patches quickly, this title might turn into the enjoyable romp it should have been. Until then though... PZ



Co-op mode offers goblin-bashing for two.

IN PERSPECTIVE

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
Reviewed Issue 116, Score 94%
Deeper, more intelligent and not as hack-and-slash in nature as *Dungeon Lords*, *Morrowind* remains king of the castle.

SACRED
Reviewed Issue 141, Score 65%
This favours an isometric view over the technical wizardry of 3D, but has similar annoying niggles spoiling an otherwise enjoyable experience.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Great character progression
- ✔ Non-stop action
- ✘ Still feels like it's in beta testing
- ✘ World feels deserted
- ✘ Essential features missing that should be there
- ✘ Balance needs some serious adjusting

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A solid RPG marred by innumerable flaws


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Shut your eyes and you could be in *Far Cry*. Open them again and unfortunately you're not.





One up the bum, no harm done.

BOILING POINT: ROAD TO HELL

■ £34.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: Deep Shadows | ETA: Out Now | www.atari.com/boilingpoint/

REQUIRES: P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB DirectX 9.0-compatible 3D card **DESIRES**: P4 2.4GHz, 1024MB RAM and a 256MB 3D card

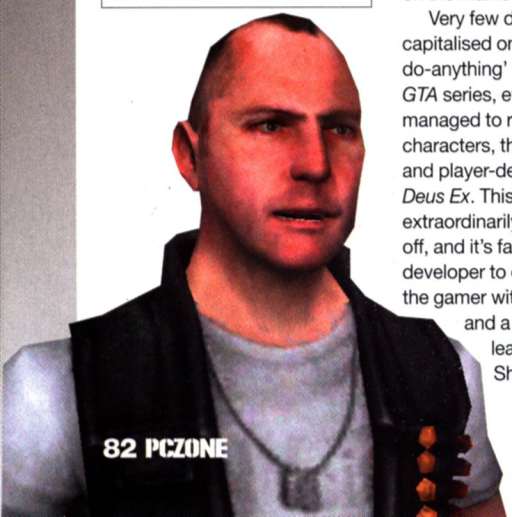
Will Porter clutches malaria tablets and a three-pack of Um Bongo fruit drink as he ventures into the South American jungle...



INPERSPECTIVE

FAR CRY
Reviewed Issue 140, Score 93%
In the hands of Crytek, *Boiling Point* would have been an instant classic. As it is, it's a mess.

FALLOUT 2
Reviewed Issue 71, Score 86%
An old, old game that manages to do everything that *Boiling Point* can't. In turn-based isometric form.



SO, *Boiling Point* then. Unfinished, dated, buggy, oddly translated, extraordinarily demanding on the system, brimming with sound problems, riddled with diabolical AI and with voice-acting so bad that one character can occasionally have three voices. But also quite fun. Probably the best shit game on the market. How so?

Very few developers have capitalised on the 'go-anywhere, do-anything' mentality of the *GTA* series, even fewer have managed to replicate the characters, threaded storylines and player-defined pathways of *Deus Ex*. This is because they're extraordinarily hard feats to pull off, and it's far easier for a developer to eat pizza, present the gamer with a big corridor and a bigger gun and leave them to it. Deep Shadows, however, is clearly up for a challenge and has created a game that tries to mix the two. The company's clearly bitten off more than it can chew – but even though a lot of goodness has fallen away from the final product, even the most stubborn gamer would have to admit that there are some niceties that have been left to chew over.

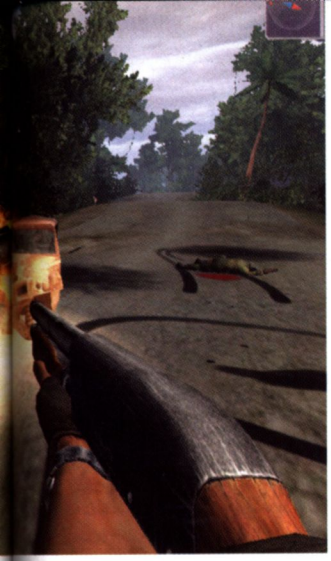
Boiling Point features a Billy Zane looky-likey called The Mummy™ (*Arnold Vosloo – Ed*), searching for his errant journalist daughter in a country in South America. I'm not overly sure which country (and neither is the game), but it isn't a very pleasant place and stars a burgeoning cast of mafia, bandits, government soldiers, guerillas, CIA agents, civilians and some brain-deadeningly stereotypical Native Indians. Every faction likes to kill each other, and all of them want things or people stolen, killed or rescued in exchange for cash. You know the score.

FOLLOW THE PATH...

Depending on what factions you side with, or how rude you are to the people you meet, different pathways open up. They're all similar pathways in truth, since everyone wants their pockets lined in exchange for your violent services, but genuine effort has clearly gone into providing different playing experiences for different people. It may not be as complex as *Morrowind* (you either play as a nasty bastard, or a really nasty bastard), but you're continually aware that there are multiple ways of making your way through the game.

This is backed up by a slightly *Deus Ex*-come-*Project IGI* feel to the missions themselves, in which you can generally approach an enemy base from a multitude of angles, with open windows, casually

"_Boiling Point_ is buggy, oddly translated and system-draining, but it's also quite fun. It's probably the best shit game on the market"





Morning on *Celebrity Love Island.*



Burt Reynolds has let himself go.



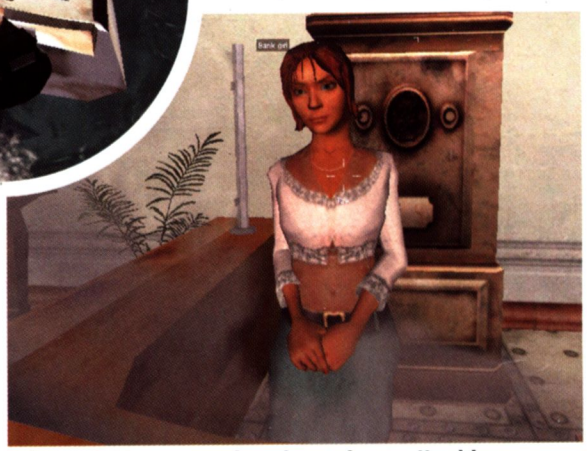
placed guards and some secret documents somewhere between them all.

FAULT LINES

The main issue with *Boiling Point* is that reading the list of things you can do in the game is far more exciting than actually doing them in-game. Having tyres blown out and replacing them, flying planes, traversing the massive play-area in stolen vehicles, getting drunk in bars and staggering out, flying helicopters, upgrading weapons, crossing and double-crossing NPC characters... It's the template for the best game of all time. But it never ever becomes anything more than a template.



Going John Woo on someone's ass... er, head.



Another random screenshot of a random pretty girl.

Despite being pretty plain in the looks department, the game ate my machine alive – if you've got anything less than 1024MB RAM, you'll undoubtedly discover some moments of extreme jerkery coupled with some major loading times. For a plain Jane like *Boiling Point*, you can't help but think of this as a major programming flaw. What's more, the AI in your enemies revolves around little more than standing and shooting (sometimes in a building, sometimes in a field, sometimes even in a bush). Plus, when they do move it's either a brainless jog in a random direction or in the form of a mystifying any-direction roly-poly. It's dire.

Vehicle handling is another spleen-venter, the bile heightened by the fact that at first you aren't aware that there's a points-based RPG skill menu lurking in the back of the game. When The Mummy™ turns up, he clearly has never so much as played with a Tonka truck. Even when you're well into the game though, you'll be spinning off roads for no apparent reason until crashing into trees simply becomes one of those things that jungle-bound mercenaries have to deal with. Plane and chopper larks also start off exciting, but have controls so lifeless and unconvincing that monotony soon forces itself back into the reckoning.

FREEZING POINT

The game is just riddled with gameplay holes. When a chair falls behind a door that's my only exit, why will it not open and why do I have to reload my game? When instructed to hunt down a jaguar that's preying on the Indian Big-Um-Chief's cattle, why does it speed towards me at 100 metres a second and attack me a couple of feet away from his tent? Add to the mix a bug that had my cars disappearing left, right and centre, reams of missing dialogue and some random government helicopters that provide insta-death, and you've got a package that may not be unplayable, but is certainly ill-planned and unfinished.

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL

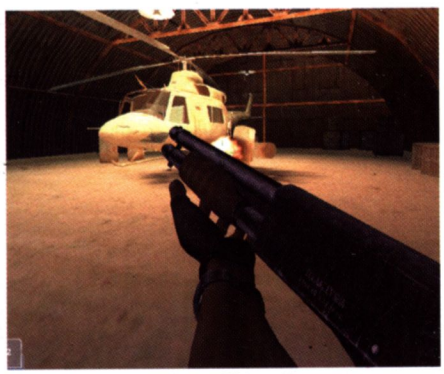
Don't get me wrong though, there are some neat little moments in here and, through often gritted teeth, it can become an entirely immersive experience. Stuff like persuading a man perched on a bridge not to top himself was a nice touch, as was the first (and only) time the government ambush you by toppling trees onto the road and leaping out of the wilderness.

What it comes down to is whether or not the bugs and the constant fear that the your game path's trajectory will irrevocably break down halfway through the game outweighs the genuinely atmospheric and addictive feeling of progressing through The Mummy's™ world. My own take on it is that you end up playing a game less on the computer in front of you and more in the wistful departments of your own brain. Yes, I enjoyed *Boiling Point*, but at the same time I know that I'm in love with a concept that we don't see enough of rather than the game itself – a game whose roots are stunted and tangled due to the Marlovian over-reaching of its developers and the conveyor-belt mentality of their whip-cracking publishers.

Done properly, with the *Far Cry* engine and double the amount of developers, this could have been amazing. Right now it is compelling, but riddled with so many problems that if you part ways with your cash for it, you're entering into a pact that will give you as much frustration as entertainment. With *San Andreas*, *Oblivion* and *STALKER* peeking over the horizon, I can assure you that freeform action-adventure can and will come in better forms than this. PZ



"Hello there! I'm an ethnic minority!"



Position the barrels and blow it away.

PCZONE VERDICT

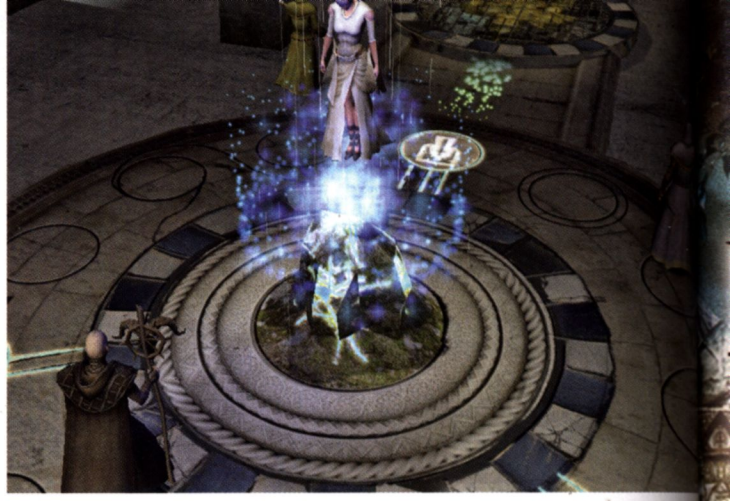
- ✔ Could have been magnificent
- ✔ Engrossing world, lots of gameplay
- ✘ Woeful AI, huge system demands
- ✘ Bugged to hell
- ✘ An unfinished game

70

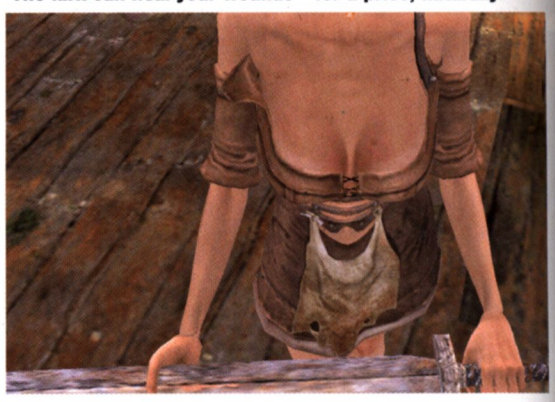
Could've been a contender



Hungry like a wolf?



The kirk can heal your wounds – for a price, naturally



"You keep your sword there?"

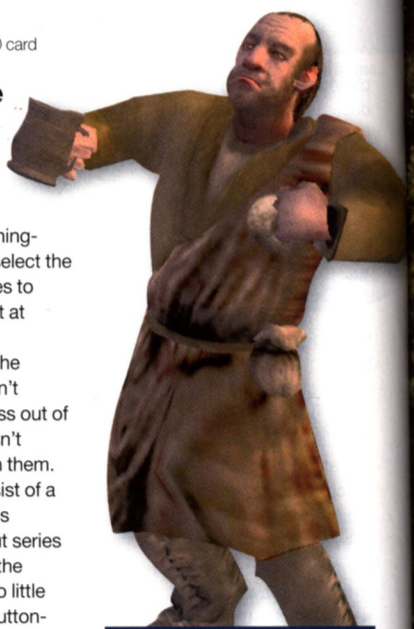


THE BARD'S TALE

■ £29.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: inXile | ETA: July 1 | www.thebardstale.com

REQUIRES PIII 933MHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2.8GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

***Michael Filby* was once told he was a bard on the outside and a star on the inside. He still doesn't get it...**



IF THERE'S one sure-fire way to drum up free publicity for your latest gaming venture, it's by wheeling out an update. In the case of *The Bard's Tale*, you'd have to be a fairly grizzled old school gamer to remember the original and its sequels from when they first showed up some 20 years ago. This particular update isn't quite as cynical as some, though – not only is the original developer Brian Fargo involved, but he's used his return as an opportunity to send up the RPG genre.

HARD BARD

Many of the nods to the clichés of the genre are made by the Bard himself, expertly voiced by *The Princess Bride's* Cary Elwes in cockney mode. A refreshingly witty but shitty character, the Bard is concerned only with earning cash through whatever means necessary, and encouraging the land's various buxom wenches to play his purple flute. Naturally, his less than noble efforts at getting his rather unsavoury end away are channelled into a more wide-reaching plot involving saving a beautiful and, of course, rich princess. Just how much of a cad the Bard is throughout the adventure is, to a limited extent, up to you, as you can pick whether to be bolshy or nice at key points during conversations.

READY TO ROLE?

The Bard's Tale is an action-RPG – a genre far more familiar to consoleites. It's even based on the same engine used for *Dark Alliance* and *Champions Of Norrath*, which are the console versions of *Baldur's Gate* and *EverQuest* respectively. Taking into account that the *Snowblind* engine is effectively four years old helps to explain it looking less than state of the art, but it's by no means terrible.

The majority of the RPG elements have been stripped down to their bare bones. The loot regurgitated by vanquished enemies (one of many commonplace RPG nonsenses acknowledged by the Bard) is automatically sold, and you have to distribute a couple of experience points every now and then when you level up. The summoning system proves to be the most interesting aspect, as once you've collected some summoning-tunes, it's left to you to select the best combination of allies to call upon to help you out at any given point.

The biggest sting in the Bard's tail is that it doesn't realise that taking the piss out of the genre's clichés doesn't excuse it from relying on them. Most of the quests consist of a repetitive and sometimes excruciatingly strung-out series of battles. The fact that the combat itself amounts to little more than uninspiring button-bashing leaves the impression that much of it is there merely to serve as padding.

While *The Bard's Tale* is told amusingly enough, the disappointing combat fails to lift it from the upper end of mediocrity. Although the gags fail to hold a candle to the likes of *Monkey Island* and its ilk, they still just about maintain your attention long enough to make it to one of the multiple endings. Ultimately it's lightweight stuff and would be a better buy if it was going for a song. PZ

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Excellent voice work
- ✔ Summoning is interesting and adds a tactical edge
- ✔ Some reasonably amusing gags
- ✘ Crap and repetitive combat
- ✘ Unresponsive controls
- ✘ Save points: GNAARGH!

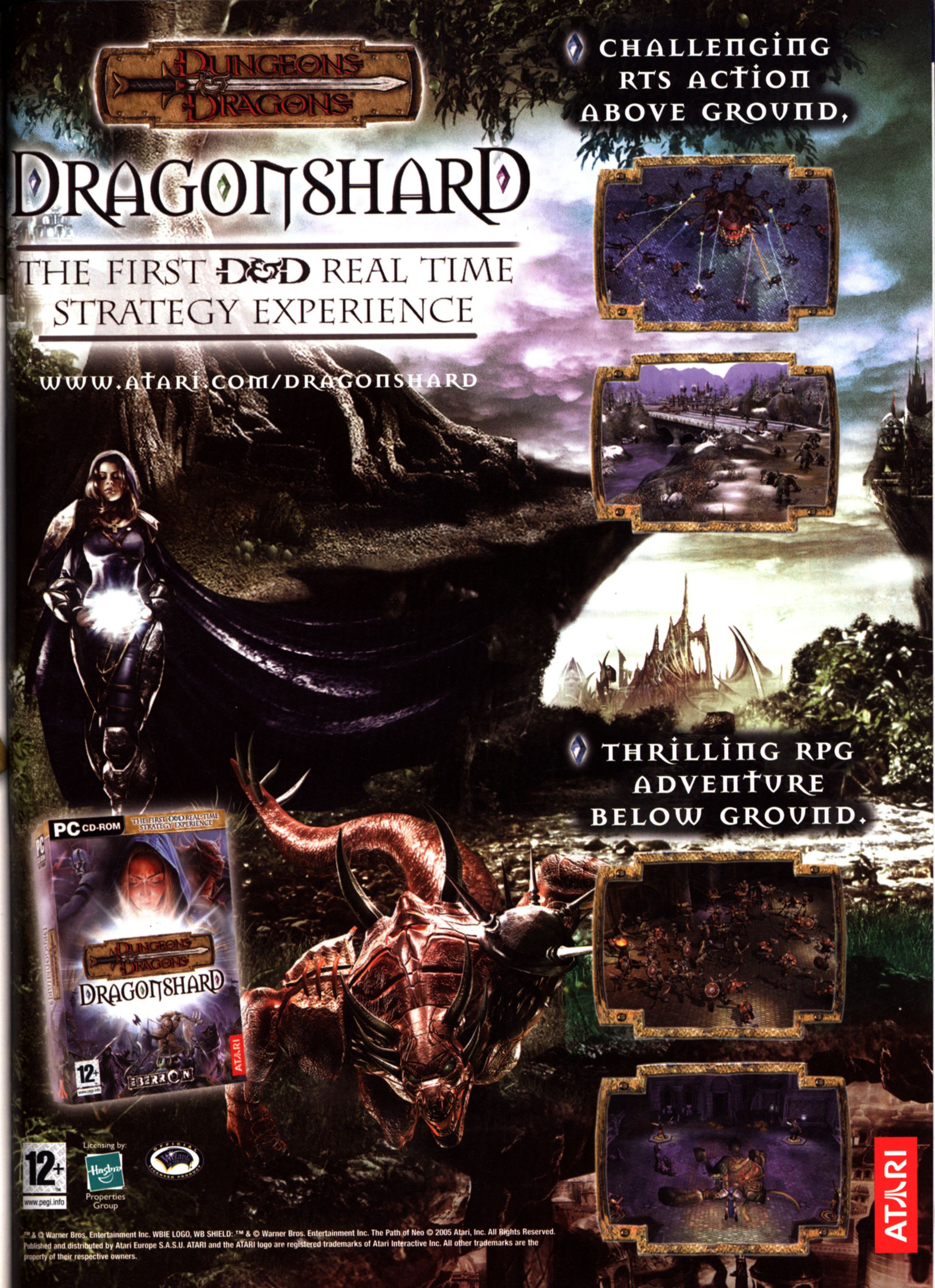
68

A tardy tale

IN PERSPECTIVE

PSYCHONAUTS
Reviewed Issue 155, Score 90%
A platform adventure that provides the contemporary definition of in-game comedy, and it's a better console conversion to boot.

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES
Reviewed Issue 150, Score 86%
A deeper kind of action-RPG that isn't funny, but makes up for it with its melancholically absorbing atmosphere. Watch out for those bugs, though.

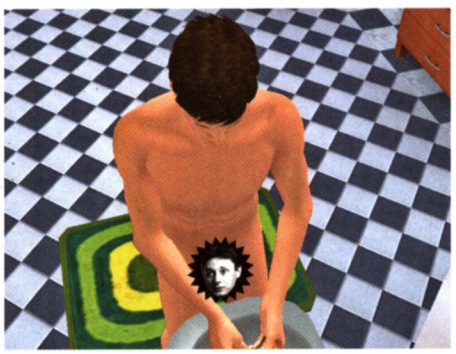

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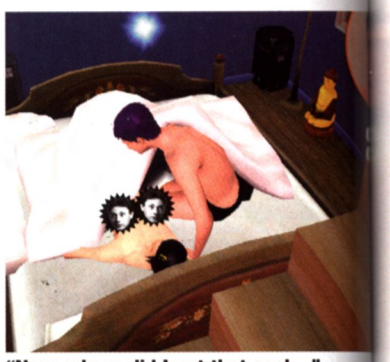
Steady on lads. It's not that kind of party.



Get stuck in while your ex-girlfriend mends the sink. Bliss.



It's polite to have a Gentleman's Wash first.



"Now, where did I put that sock..."

SINGLES 2: TRIPLE TROUBLE

■ £19.99 | Pub: Deep Silver | Dev: Rotobee | ETA: Out Now | www.singles2.com

REQUIRES P4 1.5GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2.0GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

***Steve Hill* is torn between two lovers. Threesome, anyone?**



The pillow fight technique never fails.

TRIPLE TROUBLE?

What madness is this? When this non-awaited sequel was first announced, it was subtitled *Threesomes*, with all the lascivious intrigue that name would suggest. However, the thought police stepped in, and we now have this more sanitised affair, which is nevertheless banned in Australia and carries an 18 certificate here, if only a 12 in its native Germany.

It's a farce, literally. Drawing heavily from rank '70s sitcom, *My Wife Next Door*, the premise is thus: you are Josh (if you choose to play as the bloke), a failed musician who has just split up with his girlfriend, Anna (also playable). Seeking a fresh start in a new town, you accept a flat-share with two girls, only to find that one of them is – shock, horror – your ex-girlfriend. As for the other one, she's an extremely attractive oriental sort with a pleasing habit of sitting around with her undercrackers on show.



INPERSPECTIVE

THE SIMS 2
Reviewed Issue 147, 82%
Clearly the inspiration for the series, albeit without pubic hair.

PLAYBOY: THE MANSION
Reviewed Issue 153, 62%
Similar gameplay, in that endless chat results in joyless sex.

THREE'S A CROWD

What's a guy to do? If the original premise had been sanctioned it would have taken very little thought (if a bit of imagination). Seeing as you can't have them both (at once), you're forced to choose between treading old ground with Anna, or visiting the Pacific Rim with Kim. Seeing as Anna requires wooing with candle-lit dinners and bespoke love songs, and Kim willingly puts out for a bag of chips, there's not much to think about.

That said, it took a full ten hours of gameplay – a couple of weeks in-game – to lure her into our specially bought double bed. Was it worth it? That really all depends on how exciting you find two cartoon characters fumbling about under a permanently obscuring duvet. She's clearly enjoying foreplay at one point, and then a shag, but really it's all pretty tame stuff. Perhaps tellingly, the game box contains a flyer advertising a speed-dating service.

SHOW ME THE MONEY

As is often the case, getting there is more fun than arriving. Initially at least, it's mildly compelling, with a back story revolving around your music career, a number of set quests and even some RPG-lite levelling up. You've got a mate called Magnet (presumably as in Fanny Magnet) who you can call on for advice, and you can even visit his bar and try your luck with some of the locals – in theory they're pissed, so it should be easier to get some action.

There's also the *Sims*-inspired soft furnishings aspect to play around with, which despite the premise, is still slightly gay to our minds. Plus, a lot of the time *Singles 2: Triple Trouble* is simply a domestic chore simulator, with no end of laundry and washing up to contend with. It all gets a bit too real...

But if you put the hours in, you will eventually get your end away, although it can't help but be an anti-climax. Ultimately, it's like a very slow porn film with no money shot. PCZ

PCZONE VERDICT

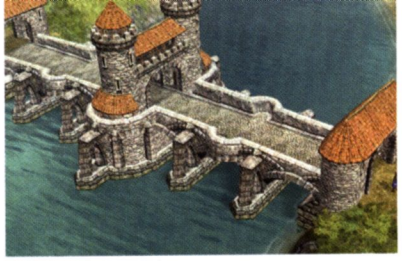
- ✔ Looks reasonable
- ✔ Quest-based gameplay
- ✔ Diverse array of character
- ✘ Interminable chat
- ✘ No threesomes
- ✘ Some text still in German

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Impotent



Now that's what we call a frosty reception.



A bridge over troubled waters.



The hula-hoop competition was a bit of a let-down.



"Now, where did I put my cannon?"



Battles are as uninspired as ever.

THE SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS EXPANSION DISK

FULL VERSION OF THE SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS REQUIRED

■ £19.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Blue Byte | ETA: Out Now
www.thesettlers.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

***Martin Korda* prepares to embrace his German side...**



WELL, they didn't waste any time did they? A mere four months after the release of *Heritage Of Kings* and the first expansion pack is already here, carrying the hugely imaginative moniker of... *Expansion Disk*. Perhaps Blue Byte just forgot to name it in its rush to satiate the management lusts of tens of thousands of impatient Teutonic strategists. Or perhaps it was just a case of cobbling together a haphazard add-on pack before the original's fans got bored and spent their money on something else instead. Call me a cynic, but I suspect it's the latter.

So, what have you got to look forward to should you decide to empty out your copper jar and invest in it? Well, not a huge amount to be honest. But if I'm being dishonest, hours of varied entertainment that takes the premise of the original and expands it in imaginative and challenging ways.

WOE IS ME

Sadly, *Expansion Disk* (surely something like the *Expansionists Of Doom* would have been better?) is about as uninspiring as add-on packs get. The new campaign picks up where the last one left off, with our atrociously-acted hero Dario tasked with fending off a new and sinister evil that threatens his land. Original it ain't.

In fact, it's testament to its utter lack of ambition that *Expansion Disk's* most notable new feature is an ability to build bridges over water, which if nothing else, does inject a modicum of tactical diversity to the proceedings. Add to that a whopping one new military unit – riflemen – and a couple of predictable heroes and you start getting an idea of just how lacklustre this package really is.



The afternoon cricket match had descended into chaos.

Thankfully, it's not all doom and gloom. The new campaign does prove to be fairly challenging, and will no doubt push most *Heritage Of Kings* fans (a big hello to all our readers in Germany) to their limits, without ever being so vexing that you'll want to rip out your own fingernails with a pair of pliers. Which would hurt like buggery, so we wouldn't advise it. The new custom maps are fairly well designed too, especially the larger ones which work perfectly with *Heritage Of King's* expansionist gameplay.

JUST SAY NO

Despite these small glimmers of potential though, I really can't recommend *Expansion Disk* – unless you fell utterly in love with *Heritage Of Kings* and simply can't go on without playing more of the same. Just like its name, this game is utterly insipid. PM

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Some decent custom maps
- ✔ Bridges add some strategic diversity
- ✔ Fairly challenging campaign
- ✘ More of the same
- ✘ Utterly uninspired
- ✘ Totally unimaginative

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Money for old rope

INPERSPECTIVE

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY
Reviewed Issue 123, Score 90%
Sure, it's getting on a bit now, but it's still vastly superior to *The Settlers: Heritage Of Kings* and *Expansion Disk* combined, and is available at a fraction of the price.

LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH
Reviewed Issue 149, Score 91%
If economic and settlement expansion isn't your thing, then check out this combat-heavy gem.

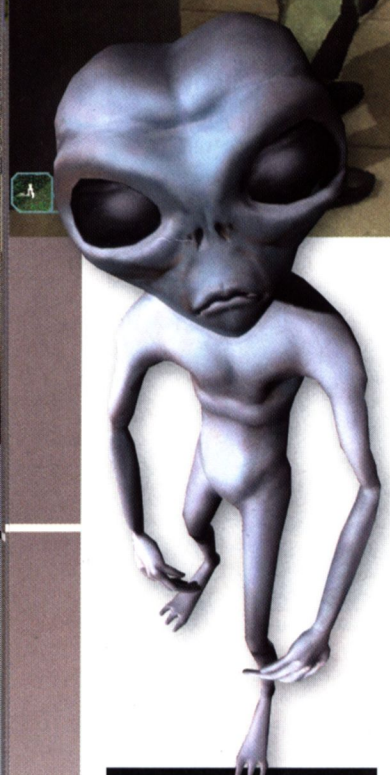


That day the mutant learnt never to play with matches while wearing a shellsuit ever again.





Muzzles flashing, yesterday.



AREA 51

■ £24.99 | Pub: Midway | Dev: Midway Austin | ETA: Out Now | www.area51-game.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card and an Internet connection

The truth is out there, or rather, it's here, as *Richie Shoemaker* delivers his verdict on Midway's conspiracy-laden shooter...

THE AIR Force Flight Test Center (Detachment 3), more commonly referred to as Dreamland or Area 51, is set across 5,200 sq km of desert north-west of Las Vegas. For some reason, it's now become a late night Mecca for conspiracy theorists, paranoid fruitcakes and local couples wanting to copulate beneath the stars.

Whether the place is sanctuary to deadly airborne viruses or extraterrestrial immigrants is something most of sound mind have grave reservations over, but one myth that surrounds the infamous alien warehouse does have credibility: get too close to the perimeter fencing and the Camo Dudes will track you down, take you away and skilfully weave a latex-covered hand up through your fire exit until you sing for Uncle Sam.

A sequel of sorts to the light-gun arcade game that was released way back when Gillian Anderson was the Net's number one pin-up girl, Midway's game fortuitously plays up to the myths that surround Area 51 rather than containing any semblance of truth. A gritty telling of government cover-ups this is not – anal probing is not a common occurrence (although what the inhabitants get up to behind the pixel-thin walls is up for deliberation).

Instead, expect to see every cliché for which Area 51 is famed wheeled out; secret societies, alien technology, research projects gone wrong, those bug-eyed Grays – they're all here; the entire nine-season run of *X-Files* condensed into a 12-hour game, only with more shooty bits.



Progression involves countless pitched battles.

BOB THE MUTANT FROM OUTER SPACE

You play Ethan Cole, a member of a clean-up team sent into the base after it appears someone dropped a test tube containing one of Marilyn Monroe's farts. The gas escapes into the ventilation system, the janitor cops an early whiff, tentacles grow out from his nipples and before you know it the place is awash with mutant villains eager to slay anything that moves. Well, the background story is slightly more credible than that, but as it's one of the game's strengths, it would be a shame to reveal it here, even if it is slightly less predictable than an episode of *Bob The Builder*.

And so, after your first meeting with a mutant, the

IN PERSPECTIVE

DOOM 3
Reviewed Issue 146, Score 90%
A more solitary experience perhaps, nonetheless *Doom 3* is scarier, better looking and scarier again than pretty much any PC shooter you can to mention. *Half-Life 2* is pretty decent too.

PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY
Reviewed Issue 152, Score 77%
Another console-led action game, one that offers up a more satisfying range of supernatural powers. Sadly, it's not the most competent console conversion and the shooty bits are a minor letdown.





Now, he looks like a friendly fellow.



Clean up the mess after you die, there's a good chap.





You can easily complete *Area 51* in a weekend.



action starts and never really lets up, so commencing a fairly typical first-person action experience. You begin as part of a team (sadly with no direct control over their actions) armed with a pistol. What's more, as the number of friendly comrades slowly dwindles, your cache of weapons grows to include assault guns, a sniper rifle and even the odd alien weapon.

TAINTED LOVE

Gripping for the most part, it's not so much the story that shines through, but the way in which it's presented. Skilfully produced cut-scenes punctuate the 18-level single-player campaign, and despite the grainy nature of CGI, every snippet of action leads you excitedly into the next firefight. The voice-acting too is pretty good, with your troops often unleashing a torrent of abuse at the alien creatures, not so much for it to be gratuitous, but just enough to allude to the fact that those you fight alongside are less killing machines and more desperate souls who happen to be in the wrong place.

David Duchovny (who else?) lends his voice to our hero's thoughts with his trademark tones of deadpan resignation. Not every line is perfect – you get the feeling that perhaps he's only read through the script that morning – but generally he suits the role. Even Marilyn Manson turns up, and although his is not a large part, he equips himself well, even if it's an unintentionally amusing cameo.

Even with the story propping it up though, the game does drag on in places. New weapons are dished out infrequently – you only get the sniper rifle, weapon number four, a third of the way through – and the number of enemy variations at this point can be counted on one hand. Instead, the game prefers to assault you with numbers, dozens of mutants succumbing in any one locale. After a while, the pitched fights seem to merge into one another, as you fight off wave after wave, crawl through a series of corridors, then search for a keycard which takes you into another battle against surmountable odds. If it wasn't for the cut-scenes and the odd stint in charge of a gun turret, the game might have descended into unending tedium.

AREA WHO?

Graphically the game is surprisingly good. Bizarre creatures fling themselves about the place with desperate abandon and the detail and resolution of the models is uncharacteristically high for what is basically a port of a console game. The layout of the complex itself tends to repeat and although getting lost is not a problem, you might be forgiven for thinking that you're constantly treading old ground. That said, the game runs like a dream, even clocking up a respectable frame-rate on a minimum spec machine.

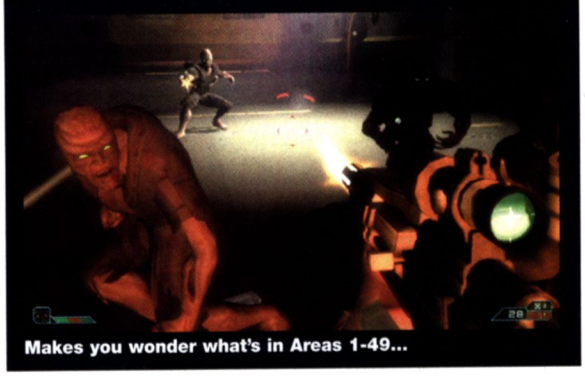
Yet, even though the price and technical requirements are low, *Area 51* is still a difficult game to recommend. The number of quality shooters on PC is stuffed to the point that you could only buy those scoring 90 per cent and still have enough to fill the coming year with unrelenting action. With the likes of *Prey*, *F.E.A.R.*, *Quake 4* and a new *Unreal Tournament* coming our way soon as well, *Area 51's* contribution to FPS history is unlikely to constitute more than a brief footnote… If that.

However, Midway's conspiracy-laden blaster is still a competent and rewarding game worthy of a couple of days blasting, so if money is tight and your PC is lacking the necessary oomph to power games that you should be playing, warm up that alien probe, lie back and think of Earth. PZ

MUTANT STORM

BEING 'SPECIAL' ISN'T ALL THAT IT'S CRACKED UP TO BE

With shooters these days enabling you to give orders to members of your team and drive various vehicles, it's something of a refreshing change to have a game that offers no such gimmicks. For most of it you're indoors, underground and on your own. *Area 51* is consequently a relentlessly dark place to be, often claustrophobic, with aliens/mutants/whatever predictably breaking through glass and bounding towards you eager to fall under a hail of bullets. But the action isn't always as derivative as you might fear: a third of the way through – and it's very difficult to explain this without giving part of the plot away – you acquire some rather extraordinary abilities and the game becomes something of a battle for survival, with even the human contingent turning on you. From this point on you can switch between human and inhuman, and clearly the design aim was to allow you to make the switch depending on the situation. However, since melee attacks are limited, you'll be glad you're not forced into using hidden powers to progress.



Makes you wonder what's in Areas 1-49...

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ A well-presented if rather prosaic yarn
- ✔ Solid FPS mechanics
- ✔ Good value if you're unable to enjoy *Doom 3*
- ✘ Nothing new here
- ✘ Repeats quickly
- ✘ Not scary in the slightest

67

Once completed, quickly forgotten



THE DAY AFTER: FIGHT FOR THE PROMISED LAND

■ Price: £19.99 | Pub: Black Bean | Dev: G5 Software
ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

***Sam Kieldsen* pulls on his radiation suit...**



Time to get your forces together.



Spots of radioactivity litter the land.



At least if the world was in meltdown there'd be no more reality TV. Hurray!

THE CUBAN missile crisis, 1962: 13 days where two nuke-toting superpowers gazed rigidly at each other, the world's fate hanging in the balance. In reality, the Soviets were the first to blink, JFK was hailed as a hero and everyone went back to listening to their Elvis records/queuing for borscht (delete as applicable). In *The Day After's* alternative reality, things didn't go quite as smoothly. In a 'most-of-the-world-died-in-a-hellish-radioactive-firestorm' kind of way.

So now we're in the aftermath, with four world powers (the USSR, the Chinese, an Anglo-American alliance and a Franco-German coalition) coming to blows over the earth's remaining resources and uncontaminated land. 1960s conventional weapons are the tools of the trade here – tanks, infantry, jets – and the medium is basic RTS gameplay with a smidgen of turn-based strategising.

The RTS bits are very much in the vein of *Sudden Strike* or *Blitzkrieg*. A typical level sees you given a small group of tanks, a couple of field guns and a handful of foot soldiers, and then tasked to capture an oil refinery or munitions factory. It's basic (if devilishly difficult) stuff, and a major step down from the likes of *Soldiers: Heroes of World War II*.

The turn-based portion enables you to move around detachments and build extra units, but if you're expecting the intricacies of *Rome: Total War's* world map, prepare to be sorely disappointed. Still, if you like your strategy games to actually contain strategy, you could do a lot worse than this.

PCZONE VERDICT 68
A hard-working soldier







You get XP for displaying various skills during a race.

SCAR: SQUADRA CORSE ALFA ROMEO

■ Price: £29.99 | Pub: Black Bean | Dev: Milestone
ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 600MHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Alfa male *Sam Kieldsen* jumps behind the wheel...

***SCAR* MAY** very well be the world's first 'CARPG.' You see what they've done there? Basically, rather than accrue money to let you tune your car in a *Gran Turismo* fashion, here you accumulate experience points in order to tweak your driver's skills and stats. It's like *Baldur's Gate* on alloys and low-profile Pirellis. You even 'level up', for goodness sake.

There are nine different areas that can be improved, including Endurance (boosts your driver's healing rate), Focus (helps reduce damage to the car and driver during prangs) and Handling (pretty much self-explanatory that one). Your man behind the wheel also has the ability to intimidate the guy in front in classic white van man-style by driving right up his arse, causing weaker-willed opponents to lose control. This also affects you, unfortunately.

And bloody hell, this game is challenging. Very much a racing sim rather than the sort of thing you can install and start ploughing through immediately, *SCAR* sports a near vertical learning curve. All it takes is one tiny mistake and your race is up shit creek, paddles not included. Thankfully, the Italian developer has chucked in a feature called Tiger Effect, which lets you wind time back a few seconds and get another shot at avoiding danger, which you'll get a lot of use out of.

So, do we have any criticisms? Well, apart from the difficulty, *SCAR* feels rather consoley in its presentation, and of course the only cars you get to drive here are Alfa Romeos. So, you have to ask yourself, are you a fan of Alfas and driving sims? If the answer's yes, you'll be right at home behind the wheel of this baby.

PCZONE VERDICT 72
SCARily decent

CROSS RACING CHAMPIONSHIP 2005



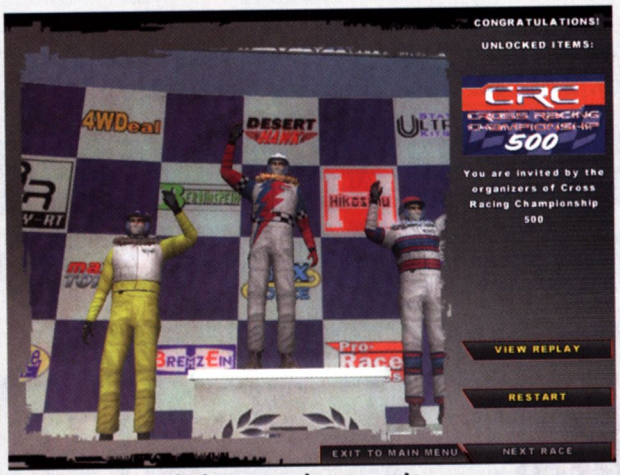
■ Price: £19.99 | Pub: Project Three Interactive | Dev: Invictus | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES: P4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card **DESIRES:** P4 2.2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Stand aside... *Sam Kieldsen*'s getting cross



There are 65 events to work through in the career mode.



Winning races unlocks gear and new events.





Ah, conifers.

IT'S NOT exactly rallying. It's not exactly road racing. What this game sets out to replicate is a mixture of the two – hence the clever term 'cross racing' – and by and large, it does so brilliantly.

Hungarian developer Invictus claims that its game is, "The most accurate recreation of real-life autocross, rally cross, off-road, dirt-track, rallying, road racing and circuit racing seen to date." Not having personal experience of such things, we wouldn't want to pass judgement on these lofty claims, but we're sure of one thing: *CRC2005* is a big shitload of fun.

The single-player game consists of the usual suspects (career mode, time trials, one-off races) and a nice selection of difficulty levels, while the races themselves are forgiving and the tracks well designed. Po-faced realism is given short shrift in favour of fast-paced action, and it's a direction we like. You can also indulge your ride-pimping fantasies by customising your cars and driver.

With lushly vegetated tracks and some lovely lighting effects, you can also sit back and admire this game – the way the sun glints off your car's paintwork is spot on. While nothing about it is going to change the face of gaming, *CRC2005* is undeniably enjoyable.

PCZONE VERDICT 76

Car-azy fun

RISING KINGDOMS

■ Price: £19.99 | Pub: Black Bean | Dev: Haemimont Games | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES: PII 800MHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES:** PIII 1GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Another generic RTS? *Sam Kieldsen* rises to the challenge



WE DIDN'T hold out much hope for *Rising Kingdoms* when the code plopped onto the desk, to be honest. A stubbornly 2D RTS set in 'the beautiful fantasy world of Equiada,' and filled with wizards, trolls and elves. Colour us decidedly unexcited.

And in truth, if you've become even slightly jaded with this kind of game yourself, there's absolutely eff-all (elf-all?) here to make you fall back in love with the genre. The inclusion of colonies and upgradeable, tougher-than-nails hero units is unusual, but not a huge departure from what we've seen before. The graphics, meanwhile, are nicely detailed and well animated – slightly *Baldur's Gate II*-esque, oddly enough – but firmly mired in the past.

Several other annoying aspects rear their heads, with clichéd dialogue ("Die, foul beasts!"), unimaginative plotlines and sleep-inducing scissors-paper-stone-meets-pub-brawl combat are the worst offenders. If you can put up with these all too familiar RTS quirks, then you might find something here to keep you occupied. God knows there are far worse titles currently vying for your hard-earned cash, so if you fancy lording it up with some daftly named characters, a few dragons and a handful of, er, mages, you might get some joy out of *Rising Kingdoms*.

PCZONE VERDICT 63

Not 'king awful





Prince Vigor. A hero like no other.



Sadly typical of this game's dialogue.

You can find demo versions of all these games on the CD & DVD. Try 'em then buy 'em...

indiezone

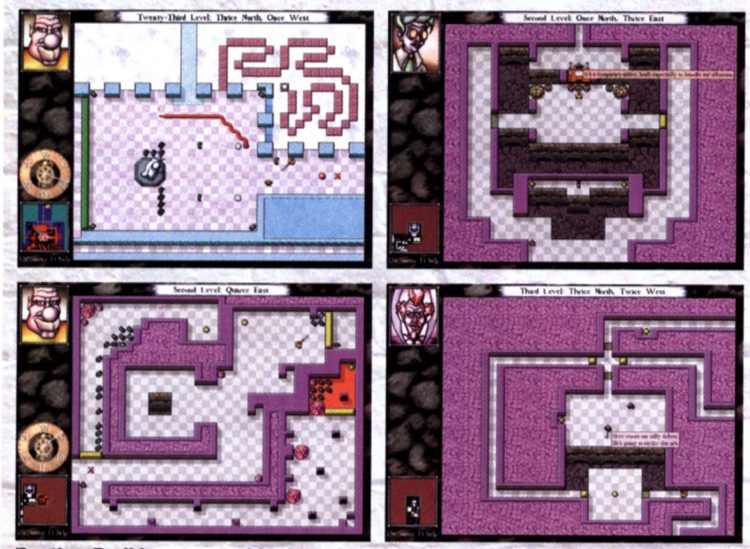
ON THE CD ON THE DVD

There's not a lot *Anthony Holden* can't do (apart from understand the rules of the beautiful game). But one thing he does particularly well is uncover indie games to tell you about...

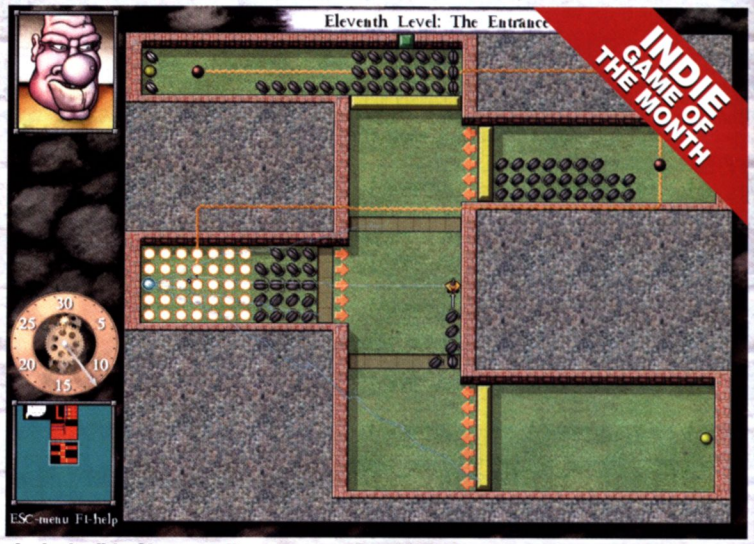


DROD: JOURNEY TO ROOTED HOLD

■ $19.95 (£10.60) | Dev: Caravel Games | www.caravelgames.com



Beethro Budkin returns, this time aided by his nephew Halph.



An invincible Slayer stalks you throughout your journey.

IF YOU'VE spent any time at all wandering the alleys and byways of the shareware games scene, you'll no doubt have come across the peculiar phenomenon that is *Deadly Rooms Of Death* (or *DROD*). A clever blend of 2D dungeon adventure and fiendish puzzle game, said *DROD* has attained near legendary status in geek circles thanks to its offbeat humour and notoriously addictive gameplay.

Now, *DROD* is back, with an even more addictive, graphically enhanced sequel called *Journey To Rooted Hold*. Picking up very much where the first game left off, *JTRH* presents you with a vast series of interconnected rooms, each of which must be cleared of monsters to solve it. The game mechanic is essentially turn-based – moving one square or rotating your sword through 45-degrees counts as one turn, during which time all the monsters in the level can also move.

It's an unusual concept, mixing the need to out-manoeuvre hordes of creatures with some truly devious switch puzzles, but it definitely works. As amateurish as it may look, this is one game that knows how to keep you coming back for more.

PCZONE VERDICT 71



Not really a fair fight in anyone's books...

MYTHIC BLADES

■ £13.21 | Dev: Vermillion Entertainment | www.cartelgames.com

MYTHIC BLADES clearly wants to be *Soul Calibur* for the PC. Nothing wrong with that – the PC could do with a decent beat 'em up – and at a glance you might think it's got a shot. But don't be fooled. As pretty as this game is by indie standards, the 3D sheen masks a somewhat primitive fighting game, with a serious shortage of animations, special moves, combos and tactical options. The characters are dull and unbalanced, the arenas cramped, the AI severely limited. It's not necessarily incompetent, it's just not much fun to play.

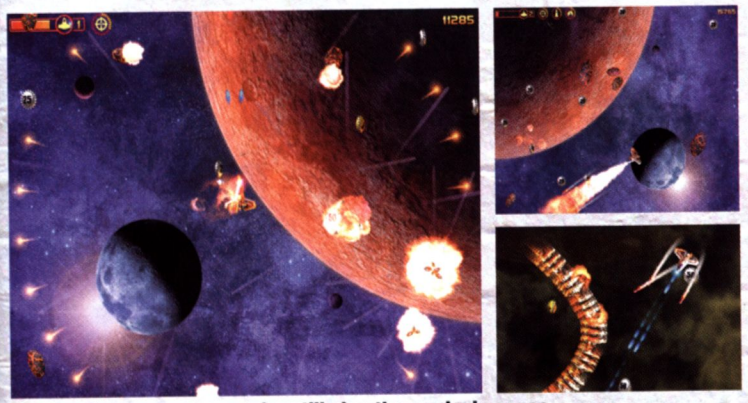
What's more, the 3D visuals are an illusion. Despite a roving camera and fully 3D environments, the gameplay is actually resolutely 2D in style, an odd discrepancy that sets a disappointing tone for the whole game.

PCZONE VERDICT 45



ASTROGEDDON

■ $19.95 (£10.60) | Dev: Ort Software | www.astrogeddon.com



30-something years on, we're still shooting rocks in space.

WHILE BY NO means as prevalent as scrolling shooters, the old *Asteroids* formula still gets a regular workout in the shareware scene. The gameplay is as simple as it gets – shoot everything on a single wraparound screen, collect power-ups and don't get hit by asteroids.

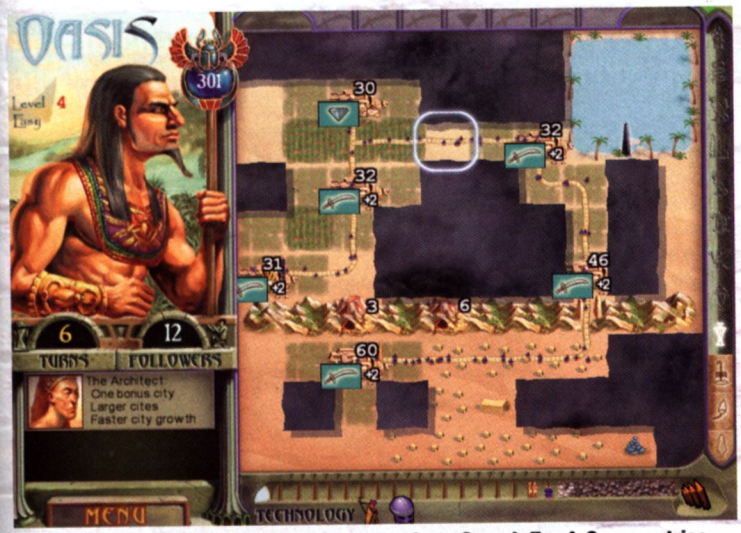
There have been two such games released just this month – *Gunstorm* from Cornutopia and this game, *Astrogeddon*. Of the two, we prefer *Astrogeddon*. It's a little less hardcore, as you can take damage before you blow up, but the graphics are parsecs ahead, and you've got both forward and reverse thrusters for extra manoeuvrability.

Of course, the don of this particular sub-genre is still *Spheres Of Chaos* (www.spheresofchaos.com), but if you're looking for something a little less acid-tinged, *Astrogeddon* is a decent effort.

PCZONE VERDICT **62**

OASIS

■ $19.95 (£10.60) | Dev: Mind Control Software
www.shockwave.com/store/oasis



Civ meets *Minesweeper* – sounds like one of our Search For A Game entries...

NO, NOT THE heavy-browed beat combo from the north-west, but a strange turn-based puzzle game that could be described as *Civilization* for juniors – with attention deficit disorder.

The simple aim is to prepare for a barbarian invasion (or a series of them), within a limited number of turns. Your basic actions are to explore the map to uncover cities and troops, then build roads to link those cities; though you also have to search for new technologies, assign workers to mines and so on. It's all very breezy and over within a matter of minutes, and the level of strategy required is almost nil. Indeed, with all the guesswork involved in clearing the fog of war, it actually resembles *Minesweeper* more than *Civ*.

Taken purely as a kids' game, *Oasis* is perfectly playable, but beyond that it's definitely maybe.

PCZONE VERDICT **51**

WILD WEST WENDY

■ $19.95 (£10.60) | Dev: Mystery Studio
www.mysterystudio.com/wildwestwendy.php



How about clicking on the exit button?

FROM THE same miscreants who brought us *Betty's Beer Bar* comes this offensively lightweight offering, which attempts to disguise some laughably insubstantial gameplay in bright cartoon graphics.



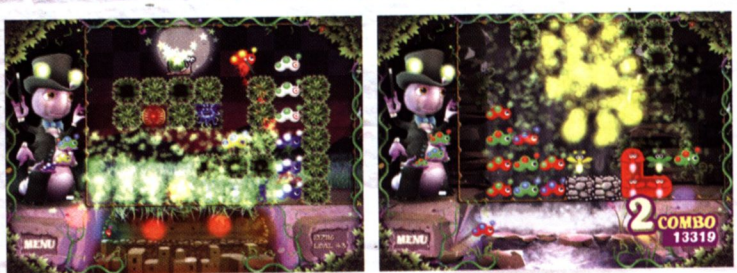
The wafer-thin premise puts you in charge of a Wild West saloon, responsible for serving drinks (achieved by clicking on customers), stopping bar fights (by clicking on them), fending off thieves (also by clicking on them) and returning stolen cattle (more clicking). Indeed, like last month's rubbish *Pizza Frenzy*, the notion of gameplay here is reduced entirely to rapidly clicking around the screen in response to flashing stimuli.

It may as well be Whack-A-Mole, and it certainly does not pass muster down here in the *PC ZONE* ranch.

PCZONE VERDICT **35**

GLOW WORM

■ $19.95 (£10.60) | Dev: Flashbang Studios
www.flashbangstudios.com



The little caterpillar dude likes to dish out the warm fuzzies.

AH, COLOUR-matching games. Perhaps even more so than *Breakout* clones, colour-matching games are the curse of the indie gaming scene. *Glow Worm* is a typically kid-friendly example of the form, but stands clear of the pack thanks to high production values and a vaguely interesting turn on the formula. Here, when you match three of the same colour glow worms, they're replaced by butterflies of a different colour, as determined by the spots on the worms' backs. The idea is to rig the arrangement so as to create cascading combo effects, while being careful not to worm yourself into a corner (ho ho).

It's largely undemanding stuff, but with enough charm to carry it off. In a world of evil colour-matching games, this one is less evil than most.

PCZONE VERDICT **59**

REPLAY

Bottom of the barrel or bargain basement? *Paul Presley* sorts the chaff from the wheat...

LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE

■ £9.99 | Pub: M.A.D. | ETA: July



"By the power of Grayskull!" Oh no, hang on...

VAMPIRES, eh? So last season. Time was you couldn't move for Nosferatu and his gang, sucking blood out of all and sundry, looking all dark, moody and stylish and giving hope to goths everywhere. Then the *Buffy* TV series finished and now it's all zombie, zombie, zombie. Rotting flesh is the new black.

With that in mind, *Legacy Of Kain* is perhaps the last of the great vampire gaming series – and sadly, *Defiance* shows every indication of having had a stake driven through its heart. Although it's undeniably pretty-looking for the time (and still not bad), *Defiance* suffers from extreme repetitiveness in its level design. After all, one sodding temple after another is enough to drive even the most fanatical religious zealot towards a path of atheism...

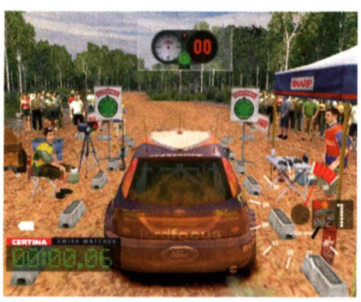
The combat is satisfyingly gory and over the top, and the dual protagonist storyline would have been great had both threads not simply been retreads of each other. Puzzles are nowhere near as clever and creative as the game's forbear (*Soul Reaver 2*), and despite the special moves, nothing really jumps out and bites you by the throat.



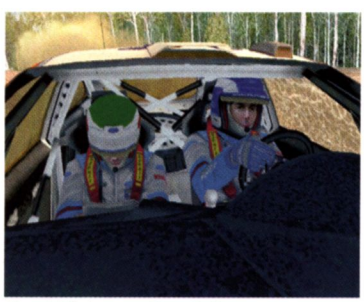
The club night had got out of hand.

Developer Crystal Dynamics has now got its hands on Lara Croft's assets and hopefully will learn from the mistakes made here to provide a boost of adrenalin to the flagging *Tomb Raider* franchise. As far as vampires go, this one has had the life sucked out of it.

PCZONE VERDICT 61



Sunroof optional.



"I said left you dimwit."

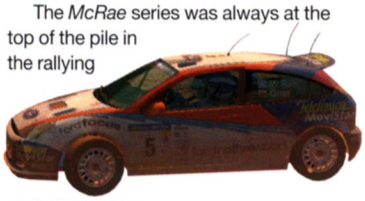
COLIN MCRAE RALLY 3

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

LIKE THE vampires mentioned above, rally games have also slipped out of fashion, replaced by the world of teenage urban racers for whom respec' and neon underlights are as vital as rollbars and Scottish navigators were for *McRae*. Even Colin himself has given up, preferring to drive across deserts in endurance races rather than muddy backwaters in Dorset.

The *McRae* series was always at the top of the pile in the rallying genre, but since each subsequent title surpassed the one that went before, going back several iterations even at this price is a bit pointless, as it just serves to highlight the flaws corrected at each stage.

Saying that, there's still much to enjoy here. The simulation is faithful enough to have you practising powerslides and handbrake turns with gay abandon, and it's always amusing to hear the parochial banter of Nicky 'hoots mon where's me troosers' Grist telling you the blind 728-degree turn around a cliff edge ahead is an 'easy left'.



PCZONE VERDICT 68

BEACH LIFE

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

SUN, SEA and sex. But no drugs. Double standards ahoy in what was to be Ian '*Final Fantasy*/Eidos' Livingstone's glorious return to being a Peter Molyneux-type industry figurehead, but what turned out to be little more than *The Sims* go on holiday via *Theme Park* with a dash of *Singles* thrown in for good measure.

It's not unremittingly awful, but for a game that was expressly designed to be a true look at the Club 18-30 world of holiday management, shying away from even minor chemical abuses (while still being fine with topless bathing, sexual intercourse and violent scenes) smacked of hypocrisy.

There are better management games out there, even at budget. Better yet, you could save for an actual holiday. You're looking a bit pasty.

PCZONE VERDICT 47



"The wet T-shirt competition will take place at four o'clock. Woohoo!"

RISING KINGDOMS

PC CD-ROM

12+ www.pegi.info

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FEEDBACK

***Will Porter* puts his ears to the ground, scans the wires and sniffs the air. And still he looks confused...**

IT'S YOUR SHOUT

Feedback is here to offer you a platform to have your say about games we've reviewed in recent issues. Whether you totally agree or utterly disagree with us, we want to hear from you. To get your views in print, all you have to do is send an email to **letters@pczone.co.uk** with **'Feedback'** in the subject line. Please try and keep your views to less than **100 words.** Anything longer will not be considered or may have to be edited for size.

PROJECT: SNOWBLIND

REVIEWED ISSUE 155 (BY WILL PORTER), SCORE: 78%

What we thought

It has none of the moments of destructive joy that *Republic Commando* provides, but certainly fills ten hours inoffensively with some neat touches and clever design when you're not juggling your weapons and abilities in the corner.

What you said

So you gave *Project: Snowblind* 78 per cent? Not too bad, but not very good either. And your nags about 'too many weapons' nearly put me off, but not enough as I bought it anyway. Its console considerations do kind of make it 'Deus Ex: The Hollywood Years', but that's no bad thing. Too many weapons? No bad thing either, I reckon – they make the on-foot sections more varied and playable than *Half-Life 2*, in my opinion.

It's a bit like the new *Doctor Who*. *Deus Ex* is the aging 'classic' and *Snowblind* is the new slimmer, sexier version for Saturday nights. I agree it's no *Far Cry* and it's no looker, but then again, it's nice to have a game come along whose specs don't marginalise it to the hardcore gamer. It's just a shame it didn't get to wear its *Deus Ex* origins on its sleeve – it would have been a great way of getting the more casual gamer to discover its horribly overlooked forebear in retrospect.

John 'lampboy' Cooper

Project: Snowblind is a vacuous game that brings nothing to the table apart from... I can't think of anything. I completed it in a couple of days, but honestly can't remember anything about it apart from not being able to work out how the kicker gun worked. It's not a bad game necessarily, but when I pay for a game I'd like it to make me say more than "Meh".

Joseph Weedon

Will's comment

It's not bad, *Project: Snowblind* – it's almost pretty good actually. It just depends how comfortable you are playing a console game on your PC – and if it brings a bit of fun and a dollop of *Deus Ex* to proceedings then I'm quite happy for it to join the party. Wide, varied and not at all intelligent – my main concern with it remains the fact that it always rushes you and never gives you time to breathe or think tactics.

STRONGHOLD 2

REVIEWED ISSUE 155 (BY RICHIE SHOEMAKER), SCORE: 85%

What we thought

As much as *Stronghold 2* is a very modern game, it also has an indefinable quality that will remind gamers of classic *Bullfrog* games; full of humour depth, subtle detail and replayability.

What you said

Richie was spot on about *Stronghold 2* – the only thing he didn't mention was the rather large amount of bugs, and poor performance, but even with those I'd still agree with his score. The graphics look great, and the detail is amazing. The additional new modes, and the separation between war and economy campaigns, make the game even more enjoyable. Balancing both the economy and the army can be tricky, but the most annoying thing is building a huge army and completing a level, only to have to start from scratch again. Why can't we keep our huge armies?

Spudy2000

This is just a quick letter to say how much I'm enjoying *Stronghold 2*. Damn it's good. Buggy too (your man didn't mention that), but now I've patched up it up it all seems to be A-OK. Good to know that British games developers are still plugging away and making stuff like this.

Ras

Richie's comment

Bugs? Well, yes there are bugs – among other issues the game was a touch over-sensitive when you asked it to place buildings, often taking over when you'd rather it didn't. To be honest, I was so swept up by the game that the bugs rarely encroached on my enjoyment. As for having armies taken from you at the start of a new mission, again, I consider it part of the game that you have to build up your resources and spend wisely. OK, so it doesn't do much for consistency, but then you could level the same charge at 90 per cent of RTS games.



***Pariah*: not universally popular.**

As Digital Extremes is the creator of *Unreal*, I expected a higher calibre of game. It's a bit like *Kingdom Of Heaven* the movie, which was a good movie, but I still expected more from the director Ridley Scott. I expected a hell of a lot more than I got with *Pariah*. Iffy vehicle controls, extremely poor AI at times and a broken storyline make *Pariah* a surefire loser. I even got the feeling as I played it that many levels are missing – I distinctly recall seeing a picture of water effects in screenshots, and don't recall seeing any levels with water in them. Save your cash and buy *Fry Cry* – if you don't already have it.

Corporate Sniper

Are you having a laugh?! Eighty-one per cent for this bucket of horseshit?! The non-existent plot, the bad cut-scenes, the pathetic AI and level design. It's worse then *Halo*!

DeAmon

Will's comment

There's no doubt that something went wrong in the creation of *Pariah*, because we certainly didn't get what we were promised. And while I'm pretty confident I nailed the areas in which it fell down in my review, I can quite see why you two feel aggrieved. It was the level designer that I spent some happy hours fiddling with that added the final few per cent when I was scoring it, but in single-player there are some blatant gameplay flaws. Does help if you like *Halo*, I agree.

PARIAH

REVIEWED ISSUE 155 (BY WILL PORTER), SCORE: 81%

What we thought

The game can and will entertain, but both myself and its creators were clearly expecting bigger, brighter and more narratively coherent things.

What you said

I expected great things from *Pariah*, but what I got was a *very* short, average console-based game. While the ending was very good, I feel totally let down on the whole.



How can a skinny Asian man stay upright with a ton of metal on his shoulder?



THE HOTTEST NEWS ON THE PLANET...

COMPUTER AND VIDEO GAMES .COM

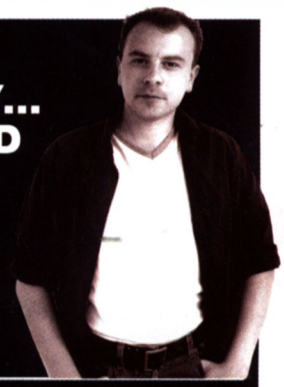
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FROM EUROPE'S NO.1 GAMING WEBSITE

*YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE **WIRED WORLD** OF ONLINE GAMING*

ONLINE ZONE



SO... VERY... TIRED

■ **ONLINE EDITOR** Paul Presley

▲ Uhh, right... Online Zone. Yes... OK. Uh, introduction. Sorry, where was I? Uh... Hmmm...? Ah! Sorry, dozed off again... been a bit tired lately... Finding it hard... To... Uh... To... Uh... Hmmm? What? Sorry! Yes, er, finding it hard to concentrate. Just had a baby, you see. Sleep something of a luxury right now... Sorry, went off again. Awake. Yes, Online Zone! Yes. Uhh, what's going on? Oh, right games and that... Just a sec... Zzz... Hnnggh! Up, I'm up! MMORPG! E3! Yes, that happened didn't it? Did it? Was it a dream? Probably not. Not getting much sleep right now. Just had a baby you see. Hmmm... What? Did I? Oh yes. Sorry, didn't mean to repeat myself like that. Finding it a bit hard to... Er, you know... Hard to... Uh... E3. Hard to E3. What? No that doesn't make any sense. Hold on, there's some pep pills around here somewhere... no, they're mints. Never mind. Where was I? E3! Yes, thank you. E3 was good wasn't it? I think. Can't really remember if I went... Finding it hard to sleep... To... Sleep... To stay awake... Wahh! Awake. Must. Stay. Awake. Sorry... Just had an E3, you see. Finding it a bit hard... To... Hard... To... Baby. Concentrate! Hard to baby concentrate! No wait, that doesn't make any sense either. Hard to E3 baby. Something like that. E3! Yes, that was good recently wasn't it? Happened, I mean. That was happened recently. I think. Hmmm? What? Previews? What do you mean... Oh! Previews. E3 previews. Over there somewhere. Lovely games. Lovely... Lovely... Sleep... Zzz... Zzzzzzzzzzzzzz... AWAKE! I'm up! Had an E3 mint! Finding it hard to Online Zone. I mean, baby Zone. I mean, Online baby. Uh, I think... Sorry, back to normal next month... Just... Need... Some... Sleep... Zzzzzz... Zzzzz... ▼



***Tabula Rasa* will see Garriott make a long-delayed comeback.**



GARRIOTT SPEAKS!

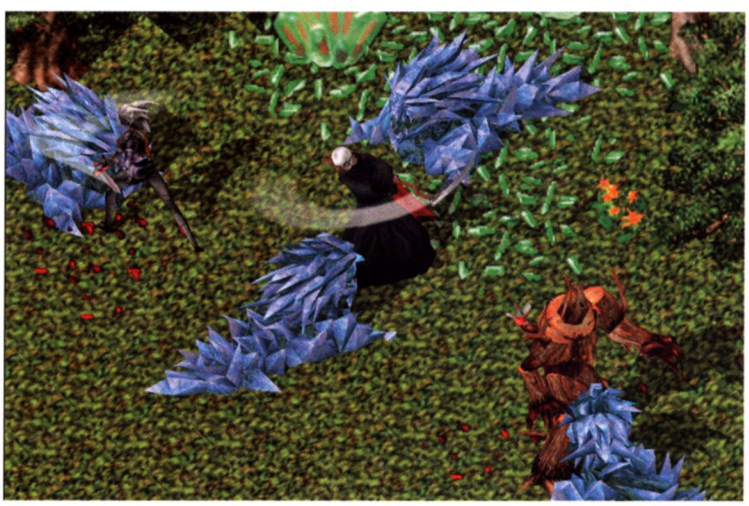
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH THE LEGENDARY LORD BRITISH



Garriott today, plaits not shown.

THE GAMES INDUSTRY is a hell of a place to grow up. Especially when the game you originally conceived out of your high school *Dungeons & Dragons* adventures becomes one of the most successful (offline and on) role-playing franchises – *Ultima*. You get your own company, create your own in-game alter ego 'Lord British', and you build a house that the Addams Family would probably reject for being 'just a little too bizarre'.

In this UK exclusive, *PC ZONE* caught up with Richard Garriott himself to find out how he views the current state of MMOs, RPGs and what he plans to do differently with *Tabula Rasa* (see page 108). Twenty-five years down the line, it's obvious he still has tremendous fondness for the *Ultima* series. But now with Destination Games becoming an internal development studio for NCsoft, Garriott is more of a company man – neat,



***Ultima Online*, still going strong.**



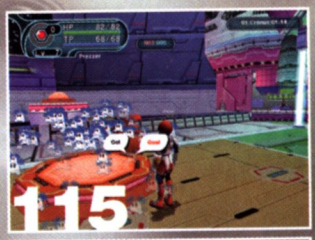
Lord British in Blackadder mode.



E3 ROUND-UP
The show must go on(line)



CHAMP MAN ONLINE
Better than the offline version?



PSO BLUE BURST
The Dreamcast classic fights on



NEVERQUEST
Steve Hill takes on Camelot





Can Garriott live up to his *Ultima* heyday? NCsoft hopes so.

presentable, always careful to promote his publisher's other games and never specifically naming the ones outside the NCsoft fold. It's only from the back, when you see the two enormously long, thin plaits stretching down his back that you realise that the spirit of Lord British is still very much with us.

PC ZONE How has *Ultima* influenced you in your development of *Tabula Rasa*?

RICHARD GARRIOTT The earliest *Ultimas* were based on ideas lifted from a wide variety of sources, especially movies and books. So originally it was built on a foundation that wasn't completely my own. *Tabula Rasa* is a great opportunity to start with a blank slate (hence the name). I'm a Tolkien-style developer, so I'm happiest when I can map every aspect of my world. It's been both a great joy but a very daunting problem. *Ultima* grew little by little, but creating something of that depth in one shot is a lot of hard work!

PCZ What do you think about the current state of MMOs?

RG Many of them are just based around going out and continually farming monsters for experience points and wealth. I don't think that makes for particularly interesting gameplay. In *Tabula Rasa*, we've created dynamic battlefields where the monsters don't just wander in the woods waiting for you to kill them, they actually have battle plans. We want it to feel more like a story-driven game that's all about you. One with mentally challenging puzzles where you get to feel that you've achieved something.

PCZ How should companies deal with the whole booming market for virtual goods that's become rampant in the last few years?

RG I think that trying to stop it is an exercise in futility. As soon as companies start participating in the exchange of real cash, then the onus will be on them to keep track of everything responsibly. It's going to be a complex problem to solve. But despite what you may think about the complex criteria that can impact on game design, and the issues that surround transactions of money, the important thing to realise about trading virtual items for real money is that you can't stop it.

PCZ Where do you stand on the whole 'there are only so many MMOs the market can support' theory?

RG People say that the market has become saturated, or it's capped. But look at how *Lineage 1* and *2* have developed. Now five million people are playing those games in Korea. That's five out of every 50 people in the country! The figures for MMO playing aren't levelling off, they're growing very rapidly and I think that's going to continue.



THE A-Z OF MMOs

ONLINE GAMING EXPLAINED

F is for food. In most MMOs, food contains more side effects than eating six-month-old Pot Noodle mixed with Experimental Chemical X.39. Oddly, these never seem to take the form of crippling stomach cramps, anal leakage or month-long trips to the vomitorium, but instead provide the munchee with extra strength, miraculous wound cleansing or even super new powers (for a limited time).

Food can usually go from being part of a living animal's vital organs to being fully seasoned, roasted and served with a side order of potato salad in less time than it takes Delia to boil an egg. A recent scheme to provide *EverQuest II* players with real-world pizza deliveries ordered from within the game is doomed to failure when it's discovered that an XXL Pepperoni with Cheese doesn't a) get delivered by a sluttily dressed dark elf female with breasts the size of Winchester Cathedral and b) provide the lard-arsed *EQ* addict with an extra 20 Charisma points (instead of an extra 20 Heart Attack points).

F is also for female clothing (and the lack thereof). While men parade around in all manner of combat-friendly fashions, suitable for adventuring in any weather condition and capable of withstanding blows from the fiercest blade, women get to wear thin strips of Lycra or a thong. Excessive skin-revealing is a must for MMO females, which isn't so bad as every MMO female measures 36-24-36 and has a distinct lack of unsightly hair growth. Something in the MMO waters we expect.

CLAN DIARY #TRUTH



ANNE ROGERS, aka Jaffy

A few hours before putting pen to paper for this column, I took part in some unusual matches. Playing against a team from Slovenia who clearly weren't aware of our gender, one of the opposition said: "Stop shooting me, I'm only a girl!" We all stopped, a bit shocked, but then carried on playing. During our very next game against some continental Europeans a similar thing happened. While we were pleased (and surprised) that so many girls were playing, we were shocked at their attitude and those of the guys they were playing with.

These women obviously haven't visited FeminaGaming – www.girlsonly.se – a site dedicated to gaming girls all over Europe and beyond. An online home for many *Counter-Strike* females, it brings girls together to discuss the issues relevant to all



The Seules team in action in Barcelona.

"I hope in time we can be united in gaming and everyone will be equal"

of us, to find teams for girls and to make friends, as well as raising awareness about female gamers. The founder of this community, Kiah Ohlson (aka Le1a) from Kalmar, Sweden, gave me her views on important aspects of girl gaming...

"When I started out there were around 10-15 girls playing," Ohlson begins. "Right now there are around 150-200 girls who play or have played *Counter-Strike* in Sweden alone. This means that during five years there's been an enormous growth – I hope this trend continues." I ask if she thinks there'll ever be as many women gamers in the world as men? Ohlson replies: "Hopefully there will, but it's not only the female scene that's growing – the male scene is growing too. I just hope that in time we can be united in gaming and that everyone will be equal."

Finally, I ask Ohlson how soon she thinks we'll see females in regular tournaments, competing with men? She says: "This coming Cyberathlete Professional League in Dallas will have a female team playing in the male tournament – I hope to see a lot more of it. If you look at female teams right now they participate in different cups and leagues that have a lot of male teams playing in it." Hopefully, when skill levels increase, sponsors will stop throwing money at female events – and this will force them into mixed events.

AN ARRESTING PROSPECT

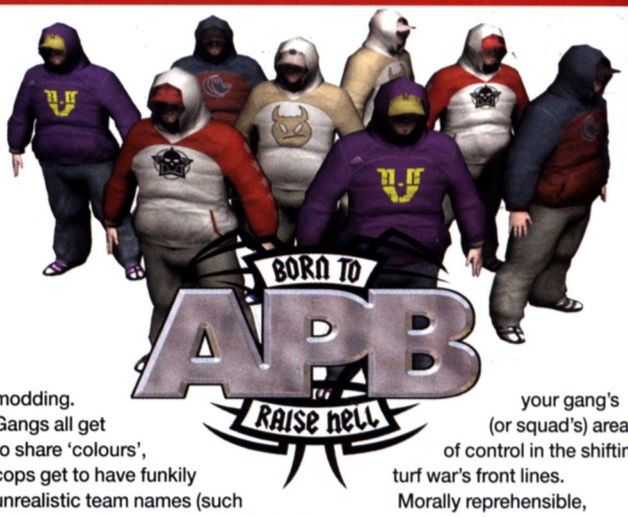


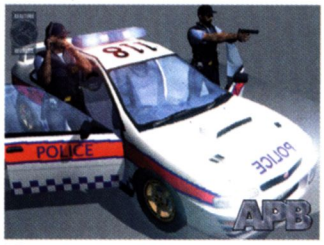
EX-*GTA* CREATOR REVEALS *ALL POINTS BULLETIN*

IT'S BEEN the ultimate dream for many a gamer, and E3 saw ex-*GTA* creator David Jones unveiling *All Points Bulletin* – essentially *GTA Online* in all but officially licensed name.

Published by Korean MMO-specialist Webzen, *APB* is the ultimate game of cops and robbers, with players choosing which side of the law to commit to, fighting for territory in a massive turf war across a full city environment.

From what we've seen, there's a strong emphasis on street crime and car chasing, delving into the current driving game flavour of the month – modding. Gangs all get to share 'colours', cops get to have funkily unrealistic team names (such as Freedom Force and Eagle Squad) and the skills revolve around lock breaking, alarm silencing and lots and lots of shooting and driving.





"Got your number!"

As you might expect, respect is as important a resource as cash and a kudos system is in place to unlock better weapons, clothing choices and music, as well as increasing your gang's (or squad's) area of control in the shifting turf war's front lines.

Morally reprehensible, exaggerated violence and full of controversy – *APB* should be all the things we love most about games. We'll take a closer look soon.

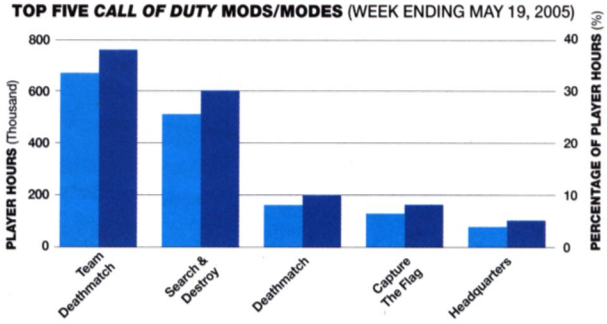
- **Publisher:** Webzen Inc.
- **Developer:** Real Time Worlds ltd.
- **ETA:** Q1 2007
- **Website:** www.webzengames.com

STATZONE

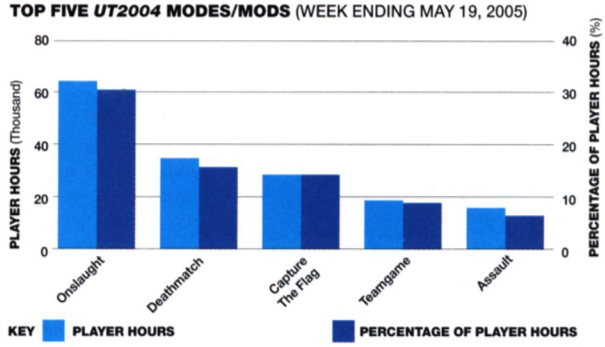
A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

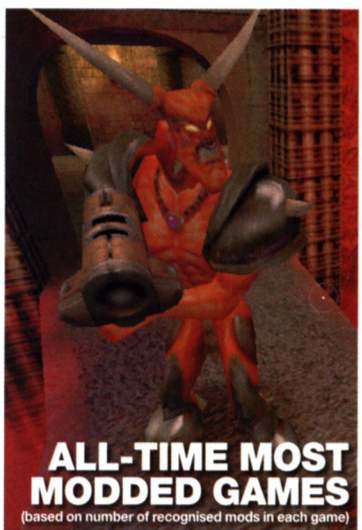
ALL DATA SUPPLIED BY: CSPORTS.NET

TOP FIVE *CALL OF DUTY* MODS/MODES (WEEK ENDING MAY 19, 2005)



TOP FIVE *UT2004* MODES/MODS (WEEK ENDING MAY 19, 2005)





ALL-TIME MOST MODDED GAMES

(based on number of recognised mods in each game)

1.	QUAKE III: ARENA	392
2.	HALF-LIFE	316
3.	TRIBES	277
4.	UNREAL TOURNAMENT	187
5.	TRIBES 2	170
6.	UT2003	164
7.	BATTLEFIELD 1942	142
8.	JEDI KNIGHT II	135
9.	QUAKE II	115
10.	ST: ELITE FORCE	75

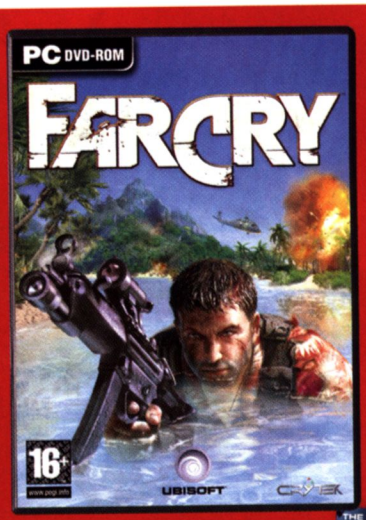
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All gifts subject to availability. Allow 28 for delivery. Minimum System Requirements: Pentium ® 200, Windows® 95/98/ME/XP, CD-ROM 4 speed, 32Mb RAM, 2Mb DirectX™ 6.1 compatible graphics, DirectX™ 6.1 compatible soundcard, 100MB hard drive space.

Order Ref: MOO6 Offer Ends 21st July 2005

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E3 2005 PART TWO



Don't go back to the water. In fact, don't go near it...



That'll make a lovely handbag. Maybe even a suitcase.



Black Beauty meets *Blackadder*.

Dance, Scheherazade...

EVERQUEST II: DESERT OF FLAMES



***Paul Presley* sets fire to his beard again**

RIVALS *Guild Wars* and *World Of Warcraft* may have been steadily garnering all the MMO headlines of late, but Sony Online Entertainment has been quietly putting phase two of the grand *EverQuest II* master plan into action. True fans will recognise the Desert of Ro, where *EQII*'s first expansion *Desert Of Flames* takes place, from the original *EverQuest*. In its first incarnation it was merely an open gaming space, but this time the whole area has been given a major overhaul and an *Arabian Nights* theme. This includes monsters such as mummies and spectres, beautiful desert scenery and also the odd magic carpet to get you from A to B. SOE has also tiered down some of the high-level content to make the game easier for solo players as well as small groups.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Sony Online Entertainment
PUBLISHER Sony Online Entertainment
WEBSITE www.desertofflames.com
ETA September 12

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Level cap increased to 60
- New trade skills, spells, items and zones
- Vertical climbing

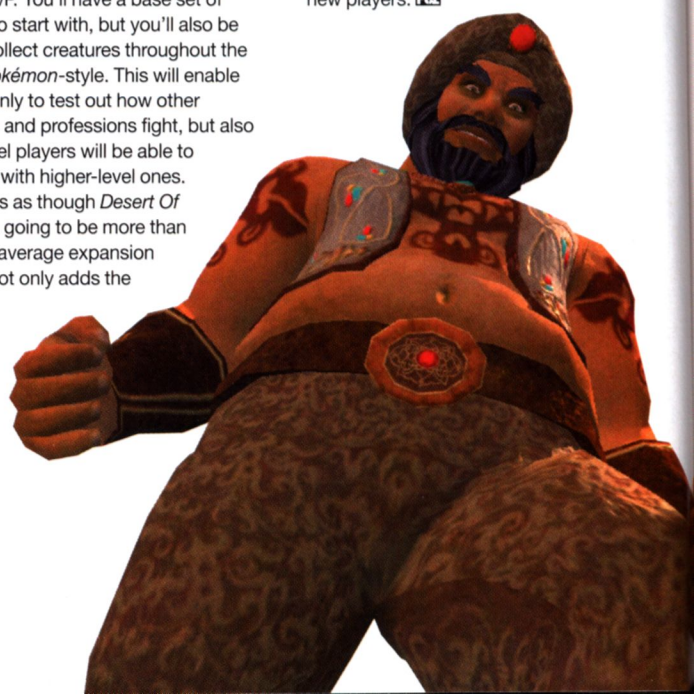
ARABIAN FIGHTS

The expansion adds 12 new zones, in particular the new city of Maj'Dul, which lies nestled in the heart of the desert. Although you'll be able to attack the NPCs in this city, it's protected by a group of flying guards that will swoop down if you cause too much trouble. And since they become more powerful the more you kill them, it dissuades you from too much NPC killing, something that's been problematic in *WOW*. The city is also home to four different factions: the Court of Tears, the Court of Coins, the Court of Swords and the Court of Truth. All the Courts have their own unique missions and eventually you'll have to decide which one you want to ally with. The strength and support a Court gets from the players will ultimately have an impact on the city itself, and dictate the types of guards present, as well as the kind of relationship the Court has with its rivals.

BIT OF A BATTLE

PvP has become a real love-it-or-hate-it feature in *World Of Warcraft*, so it will be interesting to see how it fares in *Desert Of Flames*. The developer is being quite cautious in its implementation, and is only including PvP in certain areas. However, SOE is bringing in a rather clever idea by allowing players to assume the form of different races and creatures when they fight in PvP. You'll have a base set of animals to start with, but you'll also be able to collect creatures throughout the game, *Pokémon*-style. This will enable you not only to test out how other creatures and professions fight, but also lower-level players will be able to compete with higher-level ones.

It looks as though *Desert Of Flames* is going to be more than just your average expansion pack. It not only adds the usual crop of spells, items and skills, but also changes the gameplay itself. The fact that SOE is addressing problems with the original game, while taking a long look at what's worked and what hasn't for its competitors, means *DOF* could well open up the world of *EverQuest II* for many new players. PCZ





Bad guys have all the fun...

CITY OF VILLAINS



Bwahahaha! Bwahahaha! Bwaha...!



We just can't wait to play with this...



Hmmm. Looks like a prime spot for evil.

SUPER-VILLAINS get the best lines, the best costumes and don't have to worry about little things like morality, justice, paying their taxes or picking up litter. So in that respect *City Of Villains* was an obvious accompaniment to Cryptic's *City Of Heroes*, both for enhancing the PvP element and for generally upping the number of psycho goth-chick avatars.

Villains are created in the same way as heroes, but start off in an area called the Rogue Islands. After a while they can haul their evil arses over to Paragon City and start messing things up. "Players will find themselves at odds with some of their favourite characters from *City Of Heroes* like Mynx, Backalley Brawler, Sister Psyche, Foxtrot and maybe even Statesman himself," explained Cryptic's creative director, Jack Emmert. "They'll also be battling against signature villains from *COH* as well as new ones to the game. After all the nature of evil is to turn on itself!"

WHAM BAM!

PvP is being actively encouraged, as is Team versus Team play. You'll also be able to create a super-squad base with space for house hospitals, vendors and storage. These bases will also house any items of power your team acquires. Unfortunately, although these items will grant your team various bonuses, they will also open up your base to potential attack from other players.

Improved physics, a wider variety of missions and new villainous archetypes and powers (more on that soon) means that *City Of Villains* will hopefully make the comic-book fight complete.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Cryptic Studios
PUBLISHER NCsoft
WEBSITE www.cityofvillains.com
ETA Q4 2005



Death on wheels...

AUTO ASSAULT



"It's fine. I just nudged the bumper, that's all."



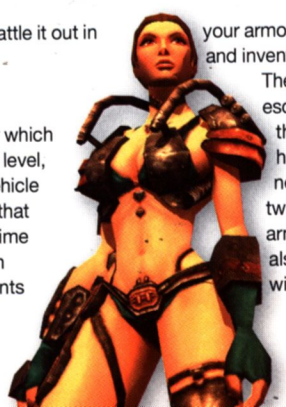
The new Saab range caused major controversy.

AS WELL AS targeting casual gamers, there also seems to be a concerted effort to turn the hypnotic, gesturing hand of MMOness towards action and twitch game lovers. There were certainly a lot of first-person MMO perspectives on show at E3, while *Guild Wars* and *WOW*'s upcoming *Battlegrounds* show that it's perfectly possible to have frantic team-based action within a heroic fantasy world.

NetDevil's forthcoming *Auto Assault* looks ready to build on this, with an innovative blend of traditional MMOG and driving simulation, within a post-apocalyptic world where humans, mutants and biomechs battle it out in vehicle-based combat.

HERE IN MY CAR

You'll get a human avatar which is the culmination of your level, skills and abilities. The vehicle you drive (and you'll find that you spend most of your time driving when you're not in cities and towns) represents your armour, weapons, speed and inventory.



There's also an almost *Diablo*-esque focus on collecting in the game, and as every item has dynamic stats, you'll never find the same thing twice. As well as weapons and armour upgrades, you can also customise your vehicle with paint jobs, fins, wings and so on, rather like a futuristic *Pimp My Ride* without the lava lamps and backseat swimming pools.

The Havok physics engine means the world you're trundling around is satisfyingly realistic and destructible. It's also easy to get to grips with as you'll never run out of ammo or petrol. *Auto Assault*'s accessible and fast-paced action will undoubtedly win it a lot of fans when it hits stores this summer.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER NetDevil
PUBLISHER NCsoft
WEBSITE www.autoassault.com
ETA Summer 2005

E3 2005 PART TWO





Brave new world...

HUXLEY

ON THE CD ON THE DVD

Nice day for a cocktail by the river.



"Where is it? Who said they saw a spider?"

***Anthony Holden* reports on the online shooter that could spell the end for *PlanetSide*...**

WHO THE HELL is Webzen, you might ask? And prior to E3, we would probably have shrugged and grunted unintelligibly. Now, it's a different story. Webzen is a Korean developer and publisher that arrived in LA with a bang this year, revealing a slew of great-looking MMOs and blowing the sweaty sports socks off many passers-by. One title was the online car-jacker *APB* (from the brains behind *GTA* – see p100), another looked suspiciously like *Zelda: The Wind Waker* online. But by far the most impressive was the spectacular *Huxley*, a massive FPS affair that sounds (and looks) almost too good to be true.

Set in a dark post-apocalyptic world, *Huxley* is all about fast-paced combat in a huge, persistent world. Two opposing races vie for control of energy sources: Sapiens (basically your standard humans) and Alternatives (hybrid mutants). A third race of AI monsters also exists to provide an alternative to pure PvP action.

The E3 video for the game is nothing short of astonishing, and some of the claims made of the game (such as the 'millions of users' hype) are clearly overstated. Our scepticism duly pricked, we tracked down project manager Yong Tae Kim and asked him to explain himself.

To start with, that video – just how real is it? "The environment is an actual game environment," Kim begins. "The weapons are the real weapons and the vehicles are the real vehicles. We've just enhanced the detail of the characters a little for the purpose of the video, but it's not far from what you'll actually see."

Fair enough. And what about this 'millions of players' business? "Well, each server can take 5,000 players, but within that area we have battle zones with up to 128 players fighting each other. But there's seamless loading between areas, so for all intents and purposes it's a big world with 5,000 players to fight."

Not quite millions then, but still pretty impressive. As we understand it, each battle zone is a roughly delineated area centred around a specific objective. Unique victory conditions exist within each battle zone, offering a variety of different tactical scenarios. What's more, a central, non-PvP area will also exist where you can chat and form squads, much as in SOE's *PlanetSide*.

IT'S GETTING BETTER...

However, unlike that game, *Huxley* is retaining some other traditional MMORPG elements to help propel the gameplay, most notably with the inclusion of NPCs. As in other MMOs, NPCs exist both to flesh out the world and provide quests for parties who want them, though the way they do this may be somewhat unusual. "If you hear an NPC screaming for help from a window," says Kim, "that might be the start of a new quest."

The other key difference to *PlanetSide* is that the combat won't suck. The battles are designed to be much more like *Quake III* than some lumbering, jerky nightmare where a stat-roll determines whether you've shot someone or not. And with the awesome power of Unreal Engine 3, you're also looking at cutting-edge physics, zero loading times, advanced AI and detailed environments. If it all comes true, we may just have fallen in love. PZ

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Webzen (H-Studio)
PUBLISHER Webzen
WEBSITE www.webzengames.com
ETA Q3 2006

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

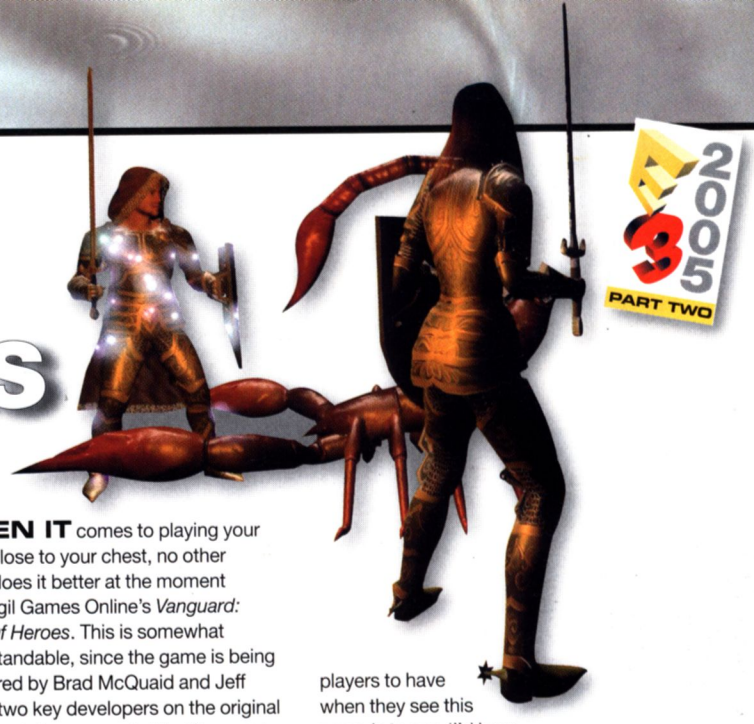
- Huge, persistent-world FPS
- Looks fantastic thanks to the power of Unreal
- Three competing races, one of them AI-controlled
- RPG-style character development
- Dynamic quests provided by NPCs



Huxley is a messianic scientist who may hold the key to humanity's survival.

Life after EverQuest...

VANGUARD: SAGA OF HEROES



THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Sigil Games Online
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE www.vanguardsoh.com
ETA TBC



This is a job for Rentokil.

WHEN IT comes to playing your cards close to your chest, no other MMO does it better at the moment than Sigil Games Online's *Vanguard: Saga Of Heroes*. This is somewhat understandable, since the game is being pioneered by Brad McQuaid and Jeff Butler, two key developers on the original *EverQuest*. It you were behind the most famous digital drug on the planet, you too would probably be rather cautious about revealing too much about the next life-sapping adventure you were preparing to unleash on an unsuspecting public...

This year, Sigil demonstrated what it's been working on since we last visited *Vanguard*, and how it's developing into what it describes as a "third-generation MMORPG". Confused? Let Travis Williams, *Vanguard's* senior producer, shed a little light for you.

"It's a combination of all the things you might typically have seen in other MMOs, but much deeper and taken to the logical next step. The reaction we expect MMO players to have when they see this game is to say, 'I'd have done that if I was making a game'!"

The combat area in particular is one aspect that Sigil has been working heavily on in an attempt to alleviate the grind factor. Every battle you have will be different and you will learn about the different creatures you fight through the level of perception your character has.

There are also plans for numerous linked attacks that can only be executed once your enemy is in a certain state such as stun, which Sigil describes as 'reactionary combat'. Expect to see more on *Vanguard* soon, because if anyone can make good on their 'innovation rather than renovation' manifesto, then these chaps can.

Magic and muscle...

AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES



THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Funcom
PUBLISHER Funcom
WEBSITE www.ageofconan.com
ETA Early 2006

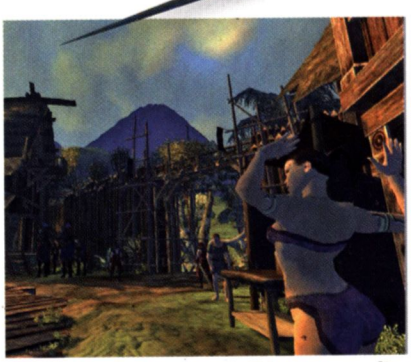
IT'S SLIGHTLY strange to think that Conan the Barbarian – whose sword and sorcery adventures were best personified by Arnie during the '80s – was actually conceived some 70 years ago by Robert E Howard for *Weird Tales* magazine. It's this original incarnation of the most famous barbarian hero that Funcom has used for the design of *Age Of Conan*, which the game director Gaute Godager describes as: "A very dark, harsh and violent world, but also one that's very lush and lustful."

There's no pussy-footing around here making bowls or herding sheep – this is a MMO that's all about fighting. There will be three different types of regular combat in the game: normal hands-on weapon combat, formation combat and lastly epic siege combats against great strongholds and towers. PvP also comes in three different types with mass PvP, team versus team and brawling – one-on-one combat that happens in special bars and inns and usually involve lots of alcohol. Just like real life in fact...

At the beginning of each level, *Age Of Conan* is set to play out much like a single-player game. You'll be immersed in a strongly story-driven world and as soon as you hit the big 20, it's off to play with the big boys. With simply stunning scenery and an immersing world fuelled by blood and sweat, this is shaping up to be the best thing to happen to Conan since Schwarzenegger slipped on a furry codpiece.



When you're feeling blue...



At higher levels you can build your own city.



Had a hard day's night? Head here.

E3 2005 PART TWO

Friends, Romans, astronauts... IMPERATOR

***Rhianna Pratchett* crosses streams in the space/time continuum**









All intergalactic pathways of space travel lead to Rome...

IMAGINE WHAT life in Britain might have been like had the Roman Republic not fallen. We might all be going to work in togas, popping out to an orgy in our lunch hour, and whipping our slaves for not recording 'Housewives Desperatus'.

Mythic's *Imperator* deals with just such a premise, although fast-forwards it some 2,000 years into the future where the Roman Republic is facing an intergalactic battle against the Mayan civilization, who secretly left Earth centuries ago.

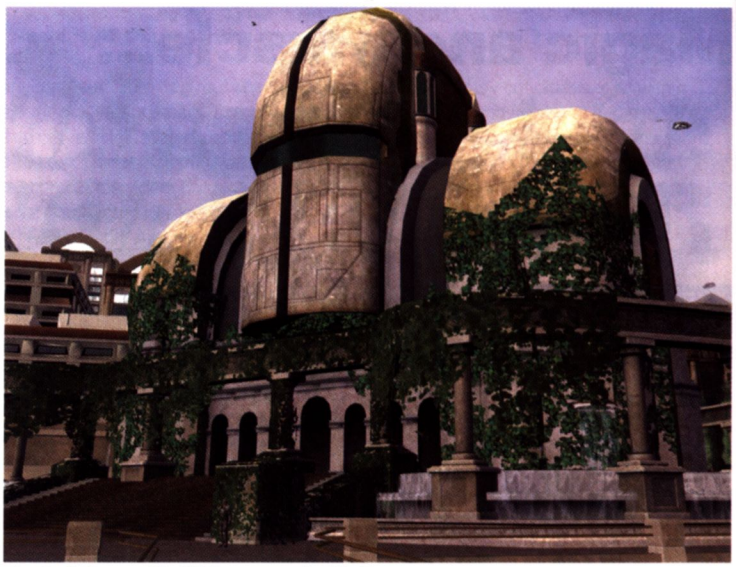
ROMAN CONQUEST

"In the world itself, Rome has expanded to a number of star systems as have the Mayans ahead of them, so there will be a remarkable number of environments to play on," explains designer Steve Marvin. "They'll be hell worlds where it's all volcanoes and steaming sulphur, ice worlds, desert worlds – in fact, anything is possible!"

You start the world on Terra (Earth), where you've gone to have a bit of a break after graduating from the military academy. Unfortunately, you find the place has been overrun by a Mayan invasion, so it's time to pack away the beach volleyball net and prepare to fight.

Marvin claims the *Imperator* team are very keen to develop a game where you're not starting off on a basic grind-wheel of whacking progressively bigger creatures.

"From the outset we want to make sure you're doing interesting things. Killing rats, or as my friend puts it 'eating houseflies for the first two levels' isn't fun. From the moment you jump in we want you to feel you're in the middle of a conflict, and you can make a difference right from the off."



The buildings will still be recognisably Roman.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Mythic
PUBLISHER TBA
WEBSITE www.imperatoronline.com
ETA June 2006

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Set in a futuristic Roman Republic
- Strong emphasis on immersive mission design and story
- Wide range of planets and environments to explore
- Create characters up to level 100



QUANTUM LEAP

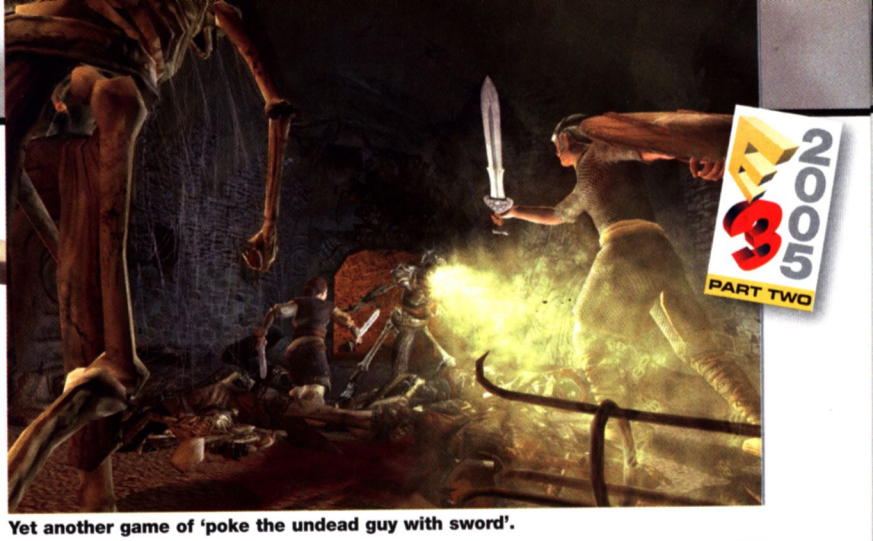
At the moment there are four different character professions to choose from, all of which can be developed up to level 100. These are trooper, gunner, biomedic and tech. There will be a fifth one for release, but all Marvin will reveal about this is that it has "something to do with quantum." Our money is on some sort of mind-power or research-based class, because although there's no real 'magic' in *Imperator*, it would be a bit remiss of the developer if it didn't put something in to appeal to players who usually opt for magic-orientated characters.

You'll be able to play as races other than humans, including robots and a futuristic elven-type race known as the Ingenii, although the complete line-up hasn't been confirmed yet. Marvin is keen to emphasise that how you develop as a character will be very much based on the decisions you make along the way, and how you involve yourself in the politics and storyline of the world.

There are some really interesting science-fiction MMOs in the works at the moment, furthering the genre that *PlanetSide*, *Neocron* and *Anarchy Online* have helped develop. From the way it's shaping up, *Imperator* could well be on the crest of this new wave.



Homely innit?



Yet another game of 'poke the undead guy with sword'.



If you're really unlucky you might meet Tom Bombadil.



When fireworks go wrong.

Hobbiton-line...

THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE

***Rhianna Pratchett* saddles up for the next *LOTR* adventure...**

NOW THAT the film trilogy has resurrected interest in Middle-earth, if you're a fan of Tolkien's world, you need something to do while you're waiting for Peter Jackson to stop messing around with big apes and get on with *The Hobbit*.

Until then, a useful stop-gap could be *The Lord of the Rings Online* (formally *Middle-earth Online*), which has been freshly plucked from the grasp of VU Games and is currently being developed and published by Turbine, the company behind the *Asheron's Call* titles.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Turbine
PUBLISHER Turbine
WEBSITE lotro.turbine.com
ETA 2006

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The first and only MMO set in Tolkien's world
- Create characters from the races of dwarves, men, hobbits and elves
- Explore the lands of Middle-earth
- Very accessible for casual players

NO MORE MR NASTY GUY

Although the developer apparently discussed the idea of being able to play the game as good versus evil, in the end it's decided to let you choose characters from the four free races of the world: men, elves, hobbits and dwarves. Unfortunately, you won't be able to tread the Middle-earth turf as an orc or a goblin.

Nor will you actually be involved in the ring quest itself, because it's up to you to become a hero in your own right. However, as *LOTRO's* executive producer Jeffrey Steefel reveals: "You get to meet recognisable characters from the books, such as Galadriel and Aragorn. Some you meet by accident, others you might have to do a quest for."

What's more, you also get to visit all the areas of Middle-earth as the game unfolds. When it launches, *LOTRO* will contain the areas in the first book such as Hobbiton, Bree and Rivendell. Rather like *World Of Warcraft*, each race has its own starting area in the world, although at the moment, only the race of man is fully implemented.

NOOB LOVIN'

That isn't the only way that *The Lord Of The Rings Online* has similarities to Blizzard's big online baby. Certainly, from first impressions the design and implementation of the newbie areas and the interface have a very *WOW* feel to them. "Although we've been working on *LOTRO* for a while, Blizzard has definitely opened up the MMO market to more casual gamers and this is something we want to take advantage of," explains Steefel.

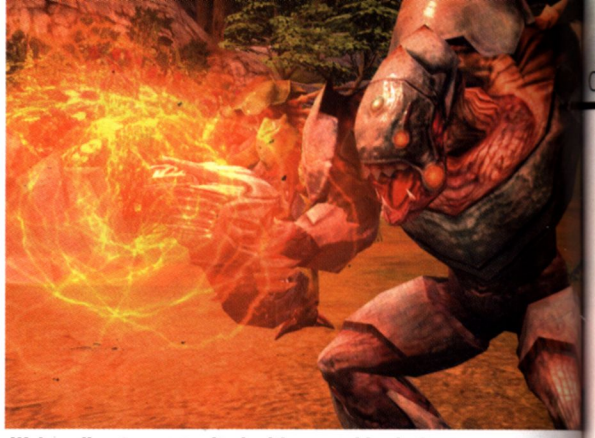
That's certainly a wise idea, because the intellectual property (IP) itself is sure to draw a very wide audience that's likely to include a strong contingent from the non-MMO playing quarter.

But as far as the IP goes, Turbine has been very jolly about the support it's been given from Tolkien estate, although it can't be easy working on a game connected to such a whopping great big franchise with a fanbase breathing down your neck. "It's really an issue of trust. The more we demonstrate that we understand the world, the more trust we gain. We even have one member of our staff whose job it is to just work on Tolkien lore..."

Rest assured we'll be joining the ranks of heavy breathers as *LOTRO* gears up for release next year. PCZ

E3 2005 PART TWO





We've all got over-excited with a sparkler before.



Tough, durable and available in a fetish shop near you.



Don't get caught behind one of these when it's had a heavy lunch.

Starting over... TABULA RASA

***Rhianna Pratchett* wipes the slate clean**

TABULA RASA has been something of a mystery over the past couple of years. First it wasn't going to come out on PC. Then it went through a major overhaul and vanished. Now it has resurfaced, *Ultima* creator Richard Garriott, the game's executive producer, explains that the main reason behind the sudden change wasn't because of nefarious secret meetings, publisher machinations or even interference from extraterrestrials, but because of fashion. Yes, you read that right.

"Visually, the game has had a very radical image revamp, although its spirit and soul is still the same," explains Garriott. "We initially wanted to separate the visuals of clothing from armour value so avatars could look more diverse. We ended up with loads and loads of great costumes. But it's very difficult to create clothing for men that's not designed to be functional, and although people liked playing the female avatars no one really liked playing the male ones all that much. So we decided to rethink the fundamentals of character attire, and this has had a trickle-down effect on other aspects of the game."



Tug-of-war: it's a popular pastime.



Stalkers hatch and drop bombs.



THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Destination Games
PUBLISHER NCsoft
WEBSITE www.playtr.com
ETA Q3 2006

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Spearheaded by *Ultima* creator Richard Garriott
- Frantic third-person action within a deep role-playing world
- You can save templates of characters
- Instantaneous teleportation travel

SCORCHED EARTH

There's certainly a touch of *Halo* and *Phantasy Star Online* about the look and feel of *Tabula Rasa*. This is partly due to the setting – Earth has been overrun by an alien race called the Bane, and the last human survivors have been rescued and given weapons and powers by mysterious 'friendly' alien creatures.

The action-orientated interface shows that, on the surface at least, *Tabula Rasa* has lots of third-person shooter influences. Garriott explains the thinking behind this: "We really wanted players to look through the screen at the activity going on in the game. In most MMOs, once you acquire a target you start looking down at your shortcut keys. We wanted to change that and make the action faster paced."

PLANET DYNAMIC

Destination Games has endeavoured to make the game world very dynamic, so it feels like the war between the humans and the Bane is constantly ongoing. Both sides have their own battlefield strategies, and the AI carries on regardless of whether the players are actively involved. But by joining in with NPCs or evoking NPC activity the state of the battlefield can be altered quite significantly.

Richard Garriott has what he describes as a "Tolkien-esque" approach to creating role-playing games – meaning that he likes to have thorough knowledge about the world he's creating, from the politics that govern it to the currency, language and preferred beverages. The fact that *Ultima Online* is still being played today is a testament to the strength of such an approach. However, Garriott and his team are gunning for a different audience this time around, so we'll be watching them closely to see if they can conjure up the same magic again. PZ



E3 2005 PART TWO

The circle of life...

THE SAGA OF RYZOM: THE RYZOM RING

THE DETAILS
DEVELOPER Nevrax
PUBLISHER Nevrax
WEBSITE www.ryzom.com
ETA Winter 2005

ALWAYS offering a dynamic and ever-changing environment, *The Saga Of Ryzom* was a place where you could make a real difference in shaping the storyline of the game and the very world itself. This winter, developer Nevrax is delivering on its promise in rather an unusual way – by giving you the ability to create your own areas and deck them out with all the flora and fauna you wish. You'll also be able to create your own characters and storylines, and manage these areas as if they were a slightly more complex, virtual back garden.

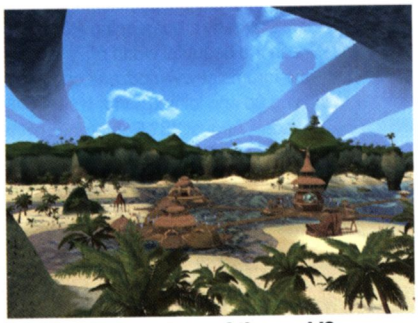
In *Ryzom Ring*, you'll be given access to a set of map templates and when you've designed and populated your area, you can throw open your doors to as many people as you like. All hosting is taken care of by Nevrax, so all you have to worry about is the fun stuff.

"It's about giving more power to the players, giving them the ability and tools to express themselves with what they can't do at the moment in *Ryzom* or any other MMORPG out there," explains Nevrax's chief technology officer Daniel Miller.

The plan is to then allow you a greater variety of tools to modify your new lands and involve all players in the ongoing *Saga Of Ryzom* storyline. If your map gets the thumbs-up from Nevrax, it could even become a permanent feature and you'll become ever entwined in the gaming world.



Good for soil drainage.



Fancy your own piece of the world?



Always know where your Mektoubs are.

Falling into darkness...

TWILIGHT WAR

THE DETAILS
DEVELOPER Smiling Gator
PUBLISHER TBA
WEBSITE www.twilightwar.com
ETA Winter 2007

MANY of us would line up to put Northern California in a post-apocalyptic state (especially after enduring the raging pit of videogames madness and $50 cab fares that is E3), but sadly we're not likely to get the opportunity. However, Smiling Gator has had the fun of doing exactly that in its *Mad Max*-style game *Twilight War*, the first Source-based MMO.

"We decided right away that we didn't want to be another fantasy MMO," reveals Smiling Gator's Matt Simmons. "There are too many big titles and we wanted to offer an alternative. *Half-Life*, *Fallout* and lots of pen-and-paper games have really done well in the post-apocalyptic genre, but so far no-one has really come out with a proper survivalist MMO."

It's certainly a harsh life in the world of *Twilight War*. Most of Earth has been devastated by an alien spaceship crash-landing in the sea and there's limited food, water and ammunition. Various factions fight for the hearts and minds of the survivors, who comprise of both normal humans and humanoid mutants too.

Although it's still a fair way off, Smiling Gator already has a very clear idea of how the political and environmental complexities of the world will operate, from faction alliances to dealing with death, right down to the visual specifics of your character's mutations. We can't wait to tell you a whole lot more about it in our next issue.



Anti-war protesters up the ante.





The new Ikea opening went better than planned.



A Silicon Republic trooper lines up a kill.

FIGHTCLUB



FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: *PC ZONE* OWNZ JØØ
FIGHT CLUB MODERATORS: REX MUNDI GOWERLY & RAD ANDY

In the last regulation Fight Club before we start our dangerous experiment with MMO PvP gaming, we took to the now-familiar streets of *Counter-Strike: Source*. With Prezzer away on child-rearing duties, the *ZONE* boys were represented by Will, Sam Kieldsen, Michael Filby and good old Uncle Wandy. The trend for custom *ZONE*-related spray tags continued abated, with more distortions of Wandy's visage than ever before, as well as our personal favourite depiction of Prezzer & Will's finest visual hour.

The action took in the brand-new Port level, although attention was divided between shooting each other and (literally) shooting fish in a barrel (well, fountain). Not a good sign. Among the star players were the representatives of the [DWC] clan, as well as Fudgemonkey, Gaz and Mixa.rar, with our own Rex Mundi making up for Will's sub-par (but slowly improving) shotgun skills.

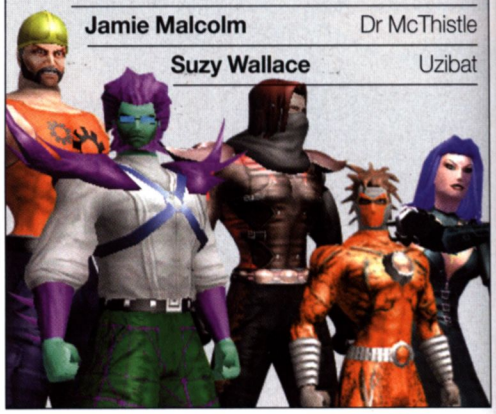
COME & 'AVE A GO!
www.zonegames.co.uk for all the info

Next month, we'll be bringing you the first of our two forays into the PvP arena action in *City Of Heroes*. The *ZONE* supergroup will be taking on all-comers on the Defiant server, flexing our mutated muscles and unleashing our eye-beams on all and sundry. Should be a right laugh, and we hope to be joined on the night(s) by some of Paragon City's more famous inhabitants. We'll also have an informal costume competition, so come dressed in your finest threads.

Following that, we're pleased to announce a *Guild Wars* Fight Club. No, we're not in NCsoft's pocket or anything, they just both happen to be great multiplayer games not called *Counter-Strike*. There's already a burgeoning *PC ZONE* readers' guild at large in the beautiful world of Tyria (details can be found in the forums at www.pczone.co.uk), so why not try signing up and joining us for a spot of PvP action on Thursday, August 18? Remember, everyone loves a monk – especially a sexy female monk.

WHO'S WHO – *COH* SPECIAL!

Paul Presley	Ginger-Vitus
Jamie Sefton	Yorkshire-Man
Will Porter	Night Porter
Jamie Malcolm	Dr McThistle
Suzy Wallace	Uzibat



UPCOMING FIGHT CLUB EVENTS

THURSDAY JULY 21
6.30pm - 8.30pm
***City Of Heroes* – PvP Special!**

THURSDAY AUGUST 18
6.30pm - 8.30pm
Guild Wars

**all details subject to change. Be sure to check www.zonegames.co.uk for the latest information



You want to take the balaclava off mate, or you won't feel the benefit...



Whaddaya mean you prefer *Counter-Strike*?



Prime candidates for a shooting spree.



***Guild Wars* should be popular.**



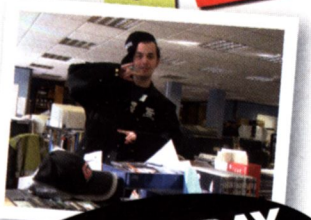
ZONE CHAT



IN BETWEEN

watching Liverpool pull off the greatest comeback since Will last played *Virtually Jenna*, Porter and Kieldsen (last-minute substitute for Prezzer) managed to entertain the masses/regulars/ne'er do wells (delete as applicable) in #pcz, with tales of E3 excesses and debate on the merits of PC gaming today. Following Will's praise-filled review, *Psychonauts* was the chosen subject, specifically the lack of availability in the UK and where best to get hold of it.

Also making a welcome return was the *ZONE* Chat competition. The task was to think up a witty and amusing caption for the picture printed above, with an exclusive *GTA: San Andreas* jacket and baseball cap up for grabs. Many fine (and awful) entries were received, but the eventual winner was potty-mouthed Lylo with: "I'll f**king deck you innit cos I'm proper f**king buzzing, f**king look at me I'm from f**king San Andreas you f**king know where that is doncha d***head? I'll f**king have you cos me dad's Spider-man, he's in for two years for murder and he gets out today. Ya silly f**king mong." I guess you had to be there.



WEDNESDAY AUGUST 17 5.00PM – 7.00PM

Meanwhile Aq3of8 won a runner-up prize of an *H&D2* watch with the more succinct: "I cry myself to sleep at night".

If you want to take part yourself in the next *ZONE* Chat, win some fantastic prizes and swear to the nation as well, all you need is an IRC browser (there are several to sample on our disc this month) and point yourself towards Quakenet. Then type '/join #pcz' and you'll soon be welcomed as part of the ever-growing *PC ZONE* posse. The channel is open 24/7, so feel free to jump in whenever.

LAN ROVER

Steve Randall's doing the LAN-beth walk...

■ www.directlanco.co.uk has been quietly lanning away since September 2003 in the North West. Now, boosted by the success of its March event, it's hosting another Lan party from July 29-31. There are a maximum of 100 attendees, so if you fancy going book your place online. It'll set you back £30 when you arrive at the Clifton TA Centre, Manchester.

■ The Dreamlan summer event kicks off from July 15-17 in East Hendred. Expect to have BBQs, drunken sing-songs, late night poker, the odd game of Risk and (if they can fit it in) a few fun LAN tourneys for the 40 users of the network. You can get information and details from www.dreamlan.co.uk.

■ Over the same weekend (July 15-17), the sixth event from www.fatboylan.co.uk is taking place in the Padworth Village Hall . £20 will cover you for the entire event (unless you hire a monitor), although for the price you'll also get to bounce drunkenly in the inflatable castle. Let's hope for a photo if all 39 people get on at the same time.

■ Subscribers will still be in time to get a place on the July 1-3 party being held by www.hglan.co.uk. You can pay £30 on the door at Queen Mary and Westfield College, Mile End, London, for the entire weekend – a snip at half the price.

■ While not hosting a LAN party at present, the Lanmaniac has left his desk again and has a back catalogue of photos of the last three years of E3 – as well as a video of booth babes. Check out his gratuitous shots at www.lanmaniac.com.

■ If you want your party to feature here, drop me a line, with at least two months advance notice, the details of numbers, costs and location at scalper@gglan.co.uk.

Scalper out.

GUILDHALL



WHO NEEDS SPEED-DATING? FIND YOUR GAMING SOULMATES HERE...

Come one, come all. If it's team-mates, gaming partners, social clubs or just a few drunken game freaks who want a laugh at the weekend, Guildhall is the place to find what you need. Whether you're looking for a clan or are already in one and need a few extra members, get in touch at the address below...

CLAN: Armed Response
CONTACT: rogue@armedresponse.co.uk
WEBSITE: www.armedresponse.co.uk
MAIN GAME: *Battlefield 1942*, *Ghost Recon*
DETAILS: We're a new but very experienced clan who're skilled at gaming. Our main games are *Battlefield* and *Ghost Recon*, but we also play *Pro Evo Soccer* and *F1 Challenge*. We're looking for mature players who just want to play and have fun. We also operate a Teamspeak server.

CLAN: (SE) Sons of Elendil
CONTACT: trey@darkjedi.org
WEBSITE: www.darkjedi.org/club/bfme
MAIN GAME: *LOTR: The Battle For Middle-earth*
DETAILS: We're a dedicated *BFME* clan and the biggest out there. We're currently looking to recruit new members of whatever skill and already have around 80 members. We consider ourselves a fun, enjoyable and helpful clan and our mission is to keep *BFME* around for a long time

CLAN: 22nd SAS
CONTACT: cadets@22ndsas.org.uk
WEBSITE: 22ndsas.org.uk
MAIN GAMES: *Call Of Duty* and *United Offensive*
DETAILS: We're a well established clan of over 40 players, now opening up to 14-16-year-olds as we appreciate some younger players cannot get in a clan because of their age. Players will get their own Clan Base ladder and will have a choice of four servers to play on.

CLAN: {dTa} Don't Trust Anyone
CONTACT: voodoodemon@dtagames.co.uk
WEBSITE: www.dtagames.co.uk
MAIN GAME: *Day Of Defeat*, *Tactical Ops*, *Counter-Strike: Source*, *Call Of Duty: United Offensive*
DETAILS: We've been running strong for just over five years. We compete in many ladders and cups, with popular servers for most games. We're a fun, friendly clan currently looking to recruit dedicated members over the age of 16 for *CS:S* and *COD:UO* matches.

CLAN: KGC| Khaos Gate Clan
CONTACT: imfartoostoned@hotmail.com
WEBSITE: www.kgc-clan.com
MAIN GAME: *Call Of Duty*, *Counter-Strike: Source*
DETAILS: We're a group of lads aged 16-39 from the UK, competing in ClanBase & Team Warfare. We have *COD* and *CS:S* servers and a 40-man Teamspeak server. We're focused on having a laugh, but want dedicated recruits to help spread our name and reputation. Hit us back.

CLAN: Emperor's Hammer
CONTACT: fo@emperorshammer.org
WEBSITE: www.emperorshammer.org
MAIN GAME: *Star Wars Galaxies*, *X-Wing Alliance*, *Star Wars Battlefront*
DETAILS: We're a gaming club for fans of the *Star Wars* series, encompassing games of all genres from the *SW* universe. We've been going for over ten years and are always on the look out for new members. We have a strong community spirit with members across the globe.

To feature in Guildhall, send your details and no more than 50 words describing your group to online.zone@pczone.co.uk (subject line: GUILDHALL) or to Guildhall, *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP.

PCZONE READERS' CHALLENGE

WIN BIG PRIZES!!

The best games, the best gamers, the best prizes...

APOLOGIES for our absence last month, but we're back now, with all the winners and, er, non-winners from round seven of the greatest online gaming tournament ever created (probably). And what a round it was!

First up, we got to see the singletons blowing each other up in one-on-one *Quake III* matches, with the low-seeded Sven 'Hirni' Leicht overcoming all the odds to take the top prize. Tournament favourite Appleseed could only manage a surprising second place, while the only UK entrant in the final four was Dozo, finishing joint third with Whylf. The matches were all covered by GTV, watched by an audience of hundreds, and our thanks go out to Oxi and Fishman for providing the coverage.

The *Day Of Defeat* 6v6 final made for similarly popular viewing on HLTV, with ZeroPoint taking on Division Wiking (dw) and eventually coming out on top by a score of 458 to 315. Last time's winners, HIID, could only make the semis – better luck next time chaps. Our thanks go out to Morthy for supplying coverage and lElitelLiberator for donning the admin mantle for the night.

Finally, our *UT2004* 3v3 challenge saw a heated battle for first place, with Brit group Divine.Sapphire eventually overcoming German clan Aliengaming in the final. Again, all matches made for some great viewing via UTV, especially the quarter-finals, ironically being Aliengaming vs Predator clan.

Round nine is almost upon us in which the prize games will be the ever-popular *Day Of Defeat*, the spectacular triumph that is *Battlefield 2* and the superb multiplayer mayhem found in *SWAT 4*. If those games take your fancy (and why wouldn't they?) then all you have to do is sign up for action at www.pczone.jolt.co.uk and get gaming. Even if you don't win you'll be in for some of the best online action around, but who says you won't come out on top, earning yourself some top-rated hardware in the process. Cool beans!

SIGN UP AT www.pczone.jolt.co.uk TODAY!







SWAT teams: extremely good at giving surprise birthday parties.



More endless carnage. Can't we play games where we're all friends?

READERS' CHALLENGE IS PROUDLY SPONSORED BY THE FOLLOWING COMPANIES

ASUS HEART OF TECHNOLOGY

The V9950 series from leading graphics card manufacturer Asus takes GeForce FX performance to a whole new level. www.asus.com

CORSAIR

The XMS product line is Corsair's premium desktop product family and the world's most highly awarded memory. www.corsairmemory.com

CREATIVE WWW.EUROPE.CREATIVE.COM

Creative's Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS soundcards and the Inspire T7700 speakers produce superior audio for gamers. www.creative.com

Logitech

Logitech raises the bar in gaming precision and performance with the MX 510 mouse and Internet Navigator SE Keyboard. www.logitech.co.uk

MSI MICRO-STAR INTERNATIONAL

A worldwide leader in the motherboard industry, MSI's K7N2 supports the latest AthlonXP and Duron processors. www.msicomputer.co.uk

PLANTRONICS World Leader in Communications Headsets

Plantronics USB headset with DSP (digital signal processing) and maximum bass response – enhanced for gaming. www.plantronics.com

Western Digital

The WD Raptor is a new class of hard drive that matches SCSI reliability and performance. www.westerndigital.com

jolt online gaming

The home of Online Gaming, Jolt provides services from basic *Quake* clan ports to managed corporate game server solutions. www.jolt.co.uk

RESULTS

QUAKE III ARENA – 1V1

QUARTER-FINALS (MAP – Q3DM13)

APPLESEED	**24 – 13**	ZERG-SPIRIT
FOREVER	**0 – 1**	DOZO
MADDOG	**20 – 30**	HIRNI
WHYLF	**12 – 9**	THEFOU

SEMI-FINALS (MAP – Q3TOURNEY2)

APPLESEED	**19 – 9**	DOZO
HIRNI	**16 – 7**	WHYLF

FINAL (MAPS – Q3DM6 & ZTN3TOURNEY1)

APPLESEED	**7 – 16**	HIRNI
APPLESEED	**7 – 11**	HIRNI

WINNERS: SVEN 'HIRNI' LEICHT

DAY OF DEFEAT – 6V6

QUARTER-FINALS (MAPS – SOLITUDE & DONNER)

IR.61	**0 – 1**	ZPOINT
HIID	**360 – 165**	ELPTHA
82ND	**286 – 267**	SD.3RGG
J52	**331 – 353**	DW

SEMI-FINALS (MAPS – HARRINGTON & ANZIO)

ZPOINT	**285 – 255**	82ND
HIID	**728 – 820**	DW

FINAL (MAPS – SHERMAN2 & CHEMILLE)

ZPOINT	**485 – 315**	DW

WINNER: ZEROPOINT GAMING

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004 – 3V3

QUARTER-FINALS (MAP – DAWN)

ALIEN	**2 – 0**	PREDATOR
D*S	**4 – 0**	CX
D*O	**4 – 0**	NP
TOAD	**4 – 0**	GAS

SEMI-FINALS (MAP – ARCTICSTRONGHOLD)

ALIEN	**4 – 2**	TOAD
D*S	**4 – 0**	D*O

FINAL (MAP – PRIMEVAL)

D*S	**4 – 0**	ALIEN

WINNER: DIVINE*SAPPHIRE

E-SPORTING LIFE

All the latest news from the wide, wide world of professional gaming. Your man at the E-Sports desk – *Philip Wride*



Get good at fragging and travel the world...

Well, what can I say other than there's a load to catch up on after a short break from my monthly column of luscious gaming goodness. The last update gave you details of the Samsung Euro Challenge in Germany, but since then we've had masses and masses of tournaments.

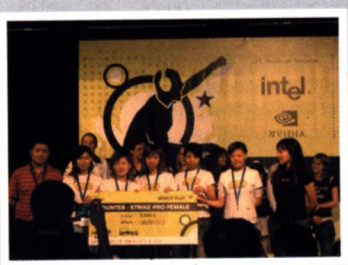
First off was the second CPL World Tour Stop, this time in Barcelona, and once again backed by Intel and NVIDIA. It turned out to be a shocker with world-renowned NiP failing to claim the title in the *Counter-Strike* tournament, falling to some poor opposition. Meanwhile in the *Painkiller* event, Stephan 'SteLam' Lammert from Germany took home the top spot after obliterating the World Champion, Sander 'Vo0' Kaasjager from the Netherlands. This was certainly a tournament that raised a few eyebrows and had jaws dropping – and not just at the scenery in Barcelona.

There were a number of UK representatives in attendance, though it was the guys from 4Kings.Intel that kept the British end up. The next stop is just round the corner, and those lucky enough to attend will certainly have some fun on the sandy beaches of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil.

Following on from this, we also had the UK qualifiers for the Abit ACON5 competition. Landed took the prize of a trip to China in *Counter-Strike* after some controversy, whilst Alex Bond booked himself a return trip after successfully defending his *Warcraft 3* UK title.

With E3 come and gone, we also saw something unique – a USA versus Europe all-stars competition. Members of the public voted for their preferred line-ups from each continent, to face off in Los Angeles for the title of 'Inter-continental Champions' in a variety of different games. In the end, it was a bit of a disaster for the *Counter-Strike* competition, as one of the European players was unable to attend due to passport problems, but the crowds still gathered around the NVIDIA booth to see the action in the other hot battles.

Next month we'll have news on the CPL World Tour in in Rio, the Abit ACON5 finals in China and and all the other E-Sports shenanigans.



CPL World Tour winnz0rs.



The l33test of the l33t.



The pre-match tactics screen is where you flex your strategic skills.



The match engine, where you impotently watch the highlights.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER ONLINE



■ Price: £3.99 monthly subscription (special offers for longer) | Dev: Jadestone | Pub: Eidos
ETA: Out Now | www.cm-online.com

REQUIRES Internet Explorer 6 or later, Macromedia Flash 7, Internet connection **DESIRES** Any Web browser will do

Steve Hill tries his hand at management on the move...

AH, THE online football management game. Many have tried. Few, if any, can truly claim to have succeeded. Names don't come any bigger than *Championship Manager* however, although it has now of course become diluted by the risible *Champ Man 5*. The waters are muddied further by this, a longstanding game put together by a bunch of Swedes, now given the *CM* branding. The *Champ Man Kart Racing* game and the Happy Meal can only be a goal kick away.

Essentially, online football management is all about logistics. One of the myriad reasons the high profile *Sky Sports Football Manager* failed was that to get the full effect, managers had to meet up at a specific time (often 12:22pm) in order to oversee their matches. *Championship Manager Online* circumnavigates this aberration by forcing you to predetermine your tactics depending on whether you're winning, drawing or losing at the 60-minute mark. The game then shuts down at midnight to calculate matches, the highlights of which can be viewed the next day – or at about 3am if you suffer from chronic insomnia.

OWN GOAL

It's mildly watchable, albeit featuring some fairly verbose descriptions of the play. You have to keep your eye on the action though, as if you drift off goals can be notched without you noticing – perhaps some kind of flashing scoreboard would have been appropriate.

Not that it matters, you can't do anything about it anyway. In fact, you can't do much at all. Once you've read your training report, configured your training schedule (which you'll inevitably leave on default) and your tactics, you're pretty much at a loose end. The rest of the time is spent attempting to set up transfers, which can be laborious. You can email other managers to negotiate, although to date nobody has replied. There's not even a match every day to occupy you, with gaps sometimes as long as five days.

FOOTBALL POOLS

On the plus side, as it's entirely Web-based, you can play it almost anywhere. As I write, I'm being served drinks by a beautiful woman poolside at my LA hotel, following a morale-sapping 4-1 defeat away to Leicester. There's something vaguely covert about sneaking off for an illicit match at a business centre, or while pretending to work on your wireless laptop (although in my case it is work).

Ultimately, it's the antithesis of the addictiveness of *Football Manager 2005*. You could rack up more hours in a single sitting of that game than in a week of *CM Online*. But for an extremely low-maintenance portable football world, it's tolerable. To paraphrase Dr Johnson, like a dog walking on its hind legs, it's not that it does it well, but that it does it at all. PZ

"The *Champ Man Kart Racing* game and the Happy Meal can only be a goal kick away"

IN PERSPECTIVE

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005
Reviewed Issue 149, Score 90%
Can ruin your life, but still the undisputed champion of the genre.
HATTRICK
Not reviewed
Longstanding online affair that seems to have stood the test of time.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Portable gaming
- ✔ Not a resource hog
- ✘ Uninvolving
- ✘ Lack of action
- ✘ Not very active community

52

Glorified beta test

PHANTASY STAR ONLINE BLUE BURST

■ Price: free download (£5.95 monthly subscription) | Dev: Sonic Team | Pub: Sega
ETA: Out Now | www.psoblueburst.com

REQUIRES PIII 700MHz, 128MB RAM, a 32MB 3D card and a 256k modem **DESIRES** P4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM, a 64MB 3D card and a broadband connection

Old enough to remember the original, *Paul Presley* blasts off for fun



They'd have to work harder that that to qualify for *Strictly Dance Fever*.



Best not to ask.



One cool dude.

PLAYING *Phantasy Star Online Blue Burst* is to remember what it was like when games were fun. It's hardly the most comprehensive online experience. It's more repetitive than a *Fast Show* catchphrase and initially as baffling as a Swedish user guide to melon farming. It's also so optimised for console play that you keep expecting your keyboard to develop trigger buttons, and sports such a disregard for traditional MMO gameplay design that *Guild Wars* looks positively normal by comparison.

But above all of that is the basic fact that the damn thing is just sheer balls-out fun, whatever way you cut it.

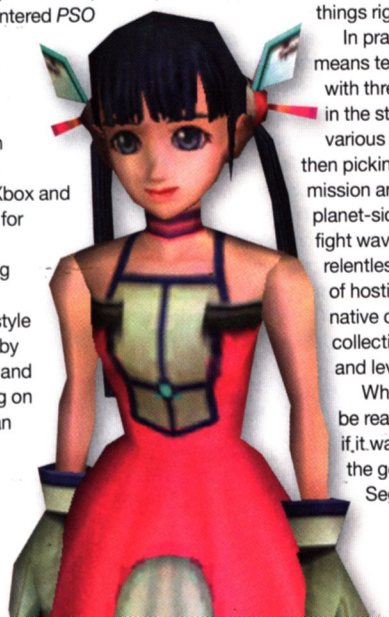
REINCARNATION

Long-time gamers will probably have encountered *PSO* in one form and on one console or another – originally on Dreamcast, moving to Xbox and Gamecube for episode II, transforming into a Pokémon-style card game by episode III, and now arriving on the PC as an all-in-one package containing episodes I, II, a restyled III and a whole new IV for your pleasure.

The story tells of the colonisation of planet Ragol and the subsequent disaster that befalls the colonists. You take up the role of a hunter onboard an orbiting station, venturing down to the planet on a series of missions to find out what happened and how to put things right.

In practice this means teaming up with three others in the station's various lobbies, then picking a mission and warping planet-side to fight wave after relentless wave of hostile native creatures, collecting loot and levelling up.

Which could be really tedious if it wasn't for the good ol' Sega magic infesting everything with a vibrancy that you just don't get from most developers. Sure, it isn't the deepest experience in the world, but there's just enough bubbling under the surface to keep you coming back. Your MAG sidekick for instance, floating robot pet things that all have different personalities, require feeding and nurturing and offer special attacks as time goes on. Or the symbol chat feature that enables you to design your own speech bubble images for quick communication. Or the special 'football' lobbies that provide a mini-kickabout arena for letting off steam between missions. Or the...



DREAMCAST TICKET

You get the idea. As is usual with Sega, *Phantasy Star Online* is jam-packed with special gaming touches all combining to create one of the most pleasing gaming environments around. It's not perfect, can come off as somewhat basic compared to the classy delights of *Guild Wars*, *EverQuest II* et all, and the interface takes a lot of getting used to. But the community is extremely sociable by and large, and prepared to help newbies rather than scorn them. What's more, the nods towards PC-style MMO design don't sit too badly with the original console mechanics (inclusion of basic guild functions don't really add much but are better than nothing), and the simplistic nature of the gameplay make it ideal for quick bursts of gaming relief rather than requiring the long-term time dedication of other virtual worlds.

It's substance over style basically and all the better for it. It's been a long time coming, but finally the Dreamcast legacy lives on. Good thing too. PZ

IN PERSPECTIVE

TOONTOWN ONLINE
Reviewed Issue 144, Score 80%
Unlike *PSO*, this Disney-based MMO is very definitely just for the kids. Lots of colourful action, famous characters and a safety-first chat system that eliminates parental worry totally.

GUILD WARS
Reviewed Issue 156, Score 94%
A similar small-group, central-hub system is at work in NCsoft's stunning effort. More depth is on offer here though and the whole experience is pleasing from beginning to end.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Bags of unadulterated fun
- ✔ Great community spirit
- ✔ Uncomplicated
- ✔ Full of ideas
- ✘ Not particularly deep
- ✘ Very repetitive

81

Simplistic, repetitive, playable

PLAN OF ATTACK BETA 1.1

SIZE 82.4MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *Half-Life 2*

www.planofattackgame.com

TOTAL CONVERSION

***Will Porter* loves it when a plan comes together**



"My turn, my turn..."



Office politics take a deadly turn.



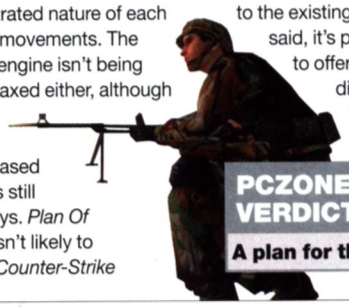
A small problem with the locals.

AND SO the *Half-Life 2* mods are officially upon us. *Plan Of Attack* takes its cue from the perennial *Counter-Strike*, pitching a team of American special forces versus an all-star team of Axis Of Evil ne'er do-wells. Although, quite what circumstances would have to take place in the world for Russia, China, North Korea and the Middle East to team up is anybody's guess – apart from anything else, the language barriers would be insurmountable. Which probably explains why I could never win a game unless I was on the US side. Or maybe I was just rubbish.

Regardless, the game differs from most team-based mods by having several objectives to capture across each map (although there's only one official map out there at the moment). Teams take it in turns to attack and defend the areas until one side has captured them all.

On top of that, at each turn one player on the attacking side gets to choose the objective to go after, with different bonuses available for a successful capture (extra weapon-buying cash, more experience points for opening better weapons and so on). This includes the chance to capture the enemy base and bankrupt your opponents for a round.

But the big question is, does it work? Sort of. Games can be confusing in terms of working out what's going on, although firefights can be spectacular and intense due to the concentrated nature of each round's movements. The Source engine isn't being unduly taxed either, although with only one released map, it's still early days. *Plan Of Attack* isn't likely to unseat *Counter-Strike* from its throne as it doesn't do nearly enough to differentiate itself, merely offering a tweak to the existing setup. That said, it's playable enough to offer a pleasing diversion should you want a break from de_dust.



PCZONE VERDICT 70

A plan for the future

BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30

MULTIPLAYER



■ Price: £34.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Gearbox Software | ETA: Out Now

www.brothersinarmsgame.com | Players: 2-4

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card and a 64k Internet connection

DESIRES P4 2.5GHz, 1GB RAM, 128MB 3D card and a 1MB broadband connection

***Jamie Sefton* heads to the front lines for a spot of bonding**

SPLINTER CELL has a lot to answer for. The rush now to be innovative in the realm of multiplayer gaming is always going to have inevitable casualties, and for all the playability of *Brothers In Arms* in single-player, online it's not quite so satisfying.

There's nothing really wrong with it – two to four players take control of a squad of AI soldiers (one running the assault team, the other the fire team), battling over ten maps, each with specific mission parameters. That in itself makes a change from just blasting the hell out of everyone, keeping true to the tactical nature of the offline game. Objectives range from blowing up (or defending) anti-aircraft guns to delivering orders to the front to setting up ambushes for unwary opponents.

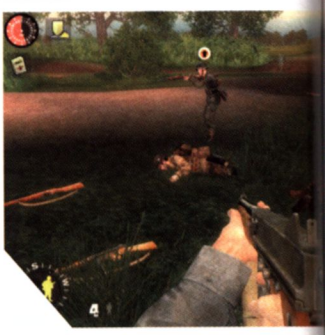
Each player has access to the full range of tactical orders for their squad, taking over the next in command if they fall prey to an enemy bullet. Firefights can be spectacular, with plenty of cover and hustling for position taking place and the AI team-mates making a decent enough fist of things.

So far so good – but unfortunately, there are problems. The in-game server browser is sparse and devoid of filter searching or organisational options. Ubi.com still has inherent stability problems, and unsubstantiated invalid CD-key errors are common with the service. *BIA* multiplayer is decent enough over a LAN, with players able to co-ordinate with each other far more effectively.

Sadly, it all just feels like something of a novelty and doesn't really have the weight to stand up against similarly-themed *Enemy Territory* matches or games of *Call Of Duty* online. Decent, but ultimately shallow.

PCZONE VERDICT	
FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 153)	87
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	79







The arrows on the helmet are a bit of a giveaway.





"Cut the black wire? They're ALL black wires!"



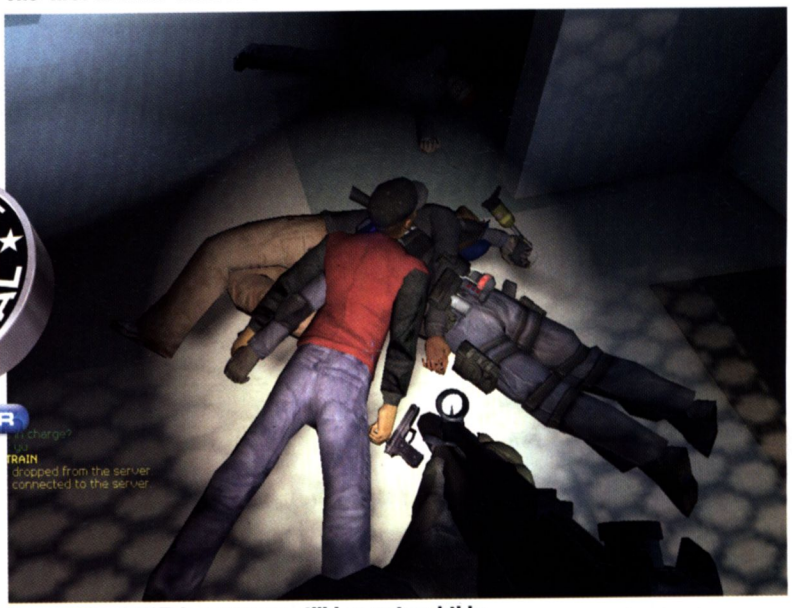
So much for teamwork.



The 'first to blink' contest enters new realms.



His back chose the most inopportune moments to spasm.



You may be SWAT, but you can still be neat and tidy.

PCZONE ESSENTIAL

SWAT 4

MULTIPLAYER

■ Price: £34.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Irrational Games
ETA: Out Now | www.swat4.com | Players: 2-16

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card and a 56k Internet connection
DESIRES P4 2.4GHz, 1GB RAM, 128MB 3D card and a 1MB broadband connection

Paul Presley prepares for a gas attack

WE HAVE a regular 'games day' here at *ZONE* (ironic, I know). Once an issue is done, the pages checked, corrected and conditioned, and the files sent to the giant print-o-tron machine in the basement, we allow ourselves an entire day of games-playing merriment in order to unwind. It used to be strippers and coke, but the expense accounts were becoming hard to justify...

The most recent of these unofficial holidays saw us donning armour and loading the pepper spray for a day of *SWAT 4*-ing, and blow me if it wasn't the best damn Games Day any of us have ever had.

Yes, *SWAT 4's* multiplayer game really is that good. At least, it's that good when you're in earshot of the fellow law-enforcers on your team and you can shout orders, insults and exasperations at them.

Easily the best of the modes is co-op – five of you ganging together to play through the single-player campaign, planning tactics, backing each other up, accidentally throwing gas grenades at each other. Coming a close second though is the VIP escort mode, which amazingly works whether you have a minimum of three players or a packed server of 16. It's perfectly balanced and the added touch of having to actually capture a fellow player rather than kill them adds a level of tactical thinking that makes playing ordinary deathmatch games almost impossible to go back to.



Deathmatching in *SWAT 4* is a team affair, SWAT vs suspects, in which one side annihilates the other (across slightly expanded versions of the single-player maps). Lip service is paid to the source material by allowing extra points for an 'arrest', something everyone ignores, and a competent but fairly lacklustre bomb hunt mode rounds off the content.

BROWSER BOTHER

While *SWAT 4* is a great LAN game, across the Internet things are a touch more messy. The server browser is very untidy and hard to navigate, the lag issues are still quite prevalent and it does seem that the majority of the playing community take the whole thing very, very seriously indeed. This is no place for n00bs, unless you're prepared for a torrent of abuse every time you make a costly mistake.

What would definitely have helped would have been a more structured chain of command setup. At the moment, anyone can bark out orders, which usually just serves to make a mess of any tactical notions unless you find yourself part of a well-honed clan. If orders could have been confined to a team leader or two, things would probably have been far more enjoyable for everyone involved.

Don't let the professional nature of the gamers put you off though. *SWAT 4* is easily one of the best multiplayer experiences you can have. If you're attending a LAN party it should almost be a mandatory fixture. Online it just takes a bit of getting used to is all, and we'd urge you to make the effort. This deserves to be the new *Counter-Strike*. PZ

PCZONE VERDICT	
FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 154)	86
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	88

COMMUNITY CHEST

TRACKMANIA: SUNRISE

A waking *Sam Kieldsen* rises and shines with the well-loved racer...



TrackMania: Sunrise isn't your average racing game. Ditching gritty, grinding realism in favour of crazy tracks full of half pipes, speed boosters and gloriously silly jumps, it exudes both a charm and an adrenalin-pumping quick pace that have earned it many a rabid online fan. Most of them are French, but don't let that put you off.

And thank the lord: it's a rule that where there are rabid fans, many of them gallic, then there's lots and lots of cool fan-created content. Just for you, we've belted up, stuck the flash motor in gear and headed out onto the information superhighway to pick up some of the best. Come along for the ride!



TM-TOOLBAR
(PLUG-IN)
www.exposia.no/tmtoolbar

Sitting neatly atop your Web browser, this toolbar displays the latest *TrackMania* tracks, community news and links from the TrackMania Exchange site (see right). A non-commercial product free from ads, adware and spyware, the toolbar is a must if you've got a burning hunger for the latest fan-made tracks.



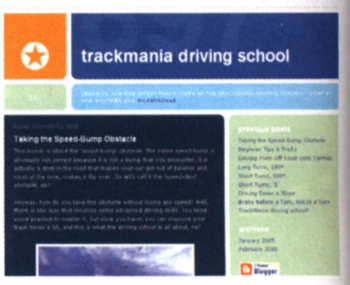
TRACKMANIA EXCHANGE
(WEBSITE)
www.tm-exchange.com

Packed to the gills with tracks for both *Sunrise* and the original *TrackMania*, TMX (as it's known to its pals) features both community-created and officially-made content, as well as a discussion forum. The handy ratings system means finding the best tracks is a piece of cake. And a tasty one at that.



TM:LEAGUES EUROPE
(LEAGUES)
thefragmag.mine.nu/sunrise0

Want to test your *TrackMania* mettle in online competition? This multiple division 3 vs 3 league – officially supported by *TM's* developer, no less – is already underway, but you can stop by here to get all the necessary information and rules in time for the next season. It also features downloads and a forum.



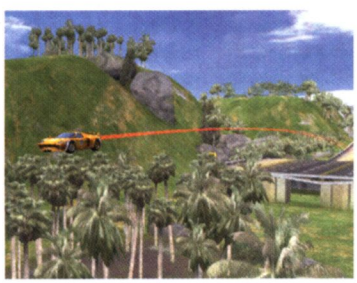
DRIVING SCHOOL
(WEBSITE)
track-mania.silentsonar.com

While it was written with the original *TrackMania* in mind, the principles behind this beginners' guide to driving apply to the sequel too. Author Wim 'silentsonar' Wouters provides plenty of screenshots to illustrate his tips, tricks and pointers, and you should come away from this gem of a site a better virtual driver.



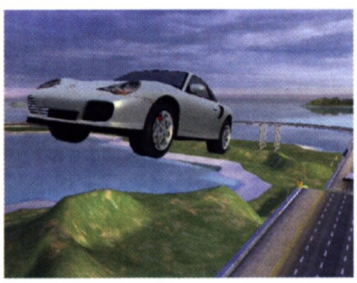
ASTON MARTIN
(CAR MODEL)
www.tm-community.com

Most of us would love to ponce about in James Bond's ride, and now you can do just that, thanks to Callyste's gorgeously realised model of the Aston Martin Vanquish. OK, so it doesn't have rocket launchers, an implausible invisible mode or an ejector seat, but it does look rather spiffing. It drives nicely too.



SPEEDBLIND
(TRACK)
www.tm-exchange.com

This aptly-named track is just one of tons of memorable fan-made examples. Put simply, it does what it says on the tin: there's a big wide track upon which you can test your vehicle's speed limit and a few gut-lurching jumps. The countryside will be flying dizzyingly past you in no time at all.



PORSCHE 911
(CAR MODEL)
www.tm-community.com

Another real-life sports car begging to be taken for a spin is the ever-popular 911, beloved of city boys, rock stars and professional footballers worldwide. Like the Aston Martin Vanquish, this is the work of Callyste, and once again the Frenchman has done a fantastic job. Nice work monsieur.



SUPERMAN2
(TRACK)
www.tm-exchange.com

It's not set in Metropolis or anything. Nope, this map is named after the Man of Steel due to the way in which it sends you hurtling through the air (faster than a speeding bullet, natch) at every opportunity. It also features a mad finish on a thin strip of land jutting out into the ocean.

STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST



Steve Hill* goes for broke in *Dark Age Of Camelot

RIGHT, this time I'm doing it properly. No jumping into someone else's body for a half-hour romp, I'm making a commitment. Financially it's ruinous, but I'm going to spend a month playing the *Dark Age Of Camelot: Complete Box*, comprising *Shrouded Isles*, *Trials Of Atlantis* and *Catacombs*. And while that may sound like a fate worse than death, if nothing else it's a nice bit of packaging, albeit something you'd probably keep at the back of your shelf rather than on display. We're talking real ale roleplaying here, proper medieval, fiddle-dee-dee, weirdy-beardy nonsense.

In keeping with this theme, I opt for the full face fuzz, entering this world as Chinglove the Fighter, a lumbering hulk of a Half-Ogre with a slightly disturbing resemblance to the Yorkshire Ripper (except with the pink ruff replaced by leather armour).

Entering Albion – 'from the rolling hills of Camelot to the mountainous peaks of Snowdonia' – I set up home in the bleak Welsh outpost of Caer Gothwaite (Caer being Welsh for castle, obsolete guttural language fans). Said castle sits atop a hill, with a gentle slope leading to the harbour below, a slope that I will trudge a thousand times.

Eagerly reporting to my Fighter Trainer, the slender Mistress Laws, she gives me the fairly loose remit: "Chinglove, go out and explore! Learn your place as a fighter. I will train you when you are ready to move on."

Fair enough, I think, I'll give it ten minutes then get back to her. In the meantime I head down to the harbour to acquaint myself with the locals. A somewhat close-knit community, I'm not suggesting they're riddled with generations of inbreeding, but they do all have something of a look about them.

OH BUGGER...

Eyeing me with suspicion, I feel about as welcome as an Englishman in Wales, and instinctively leap into a nearby portal. As is the way with these things, I'm transported to a mystical land populated by giant crabs and am immediately killed by one. Reeling at the shock of a swarthy Half-Ogre being slain by seafood, I resolve to toughen up, although suffer a further setback when I'm felled by a large dragonfly.

This is getting embarrassing, and I decide that superior weaponry is the only way forward. Unfortunately I have this much money: none. Appalling as it sounds, I'm going to have to get a job. Asking around, there's not much doing, but I do receive an offer to clear a nearby lake of swamp goo.

This isn't as easy as it sounds, swamp goo being a living organism that not only fights back, but is seemingly invincible when underwater. As such, I have to corral individual blobs to the shore and smite them with my broadsword, which stretches both my patience and dignity, even more so when I receive my desultory pay packet. I promptly blow it on a new jerkin, stamping my personality on it by dyeing it a fetching shade of yellow.

GIS A JOB

The bosses seem happy enough with my work, and I soon secure a gig slaughtering dragonflies. While it keeps me busy, the daily toil sees my mind wander as I begin to dream of what lies beyond the hills. I'm the only Half-Ogre in the village, and the social scene isn't all it could be, as the following random exchange proves.

Me: "What kind of name is that? Clothyard? What were you thinking?"

Clothyard: "A Clothyard Shaft is the name for an arrow fired from a longbow."

Me: "So?"

Clothyard: "The name derives from the fact that the arrows measure a Clothmaker's Yard."

Me: "Fascinating stuff... Still a weird name to give yourself."

Clothyard: "This from someone called Chinglove? Hehe."

Me: "At least that describes my appearance."

Clothyard: "Really, hmmm."

Me: "I've got a glove on my chin."

Before he runs away, Clothyard tells me that there's a pub. Unfortunately it's also in Camelot, and on my paltry wage I'll never afford the horse fare.

MONEY FOR NOTHING

Then one day it all changes. A stranger rides into town, a shiny-armoured knight by the name of Loudmouth Braggart.

"Can I be in your gang?" I chance. "I'm great at killing dragonflies."

"Hmmm, what's the bounty on a dragonfly's head," laughs Braggart. "Here, have a reward."

At this he promptly drops me 30 Gold, the equivalent of a King's ransom for a lowly fly-swatter-cum-swamp-dredger. Finally, I'm free of this parochial hell. I ditch the job, buy myself some new clobber and a big stick and jump aboard the one horse out of this town. Look at me now, riding o'er hill and dale aboard this trusty steed. I've got a one-way ticket to Camelot and I'm never coming back. This time next month I'll be a millionaire. Or wanking off wizards for coppers.

To be continued... PCZ

"I'm the only Half-Ogre in the village, and the social scene isn't all it could be..."



Not your typical sanitation engineer.

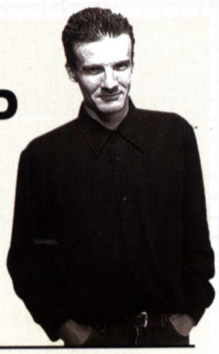


At least Wales is looking up.

HARDWARE

ALL THE LATEST NEWS AND REVIEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PC HARDWARE

ENEMA SPOTTED



■ **HARDWARE EDITOR** Phil Wand

I've just completed my first *Counter-Strike* match. Sure, I've played 'hostages and bad guys go camping' before, but I'd always been overwhelmed by the repetition, quitting out two or three rounds before the level changed from cs_ inevitable to de_dejavu.

Not this time. It was Fight Club night, reputations were at stake and I was a top scorer on the super-awesome *ZONE* team in the early part of the evening. It meant that my major complaint about the game – that you don't need any skill to play it – was upheld each time anyone looked at the scoreboard. And yes, it also meant we lost.

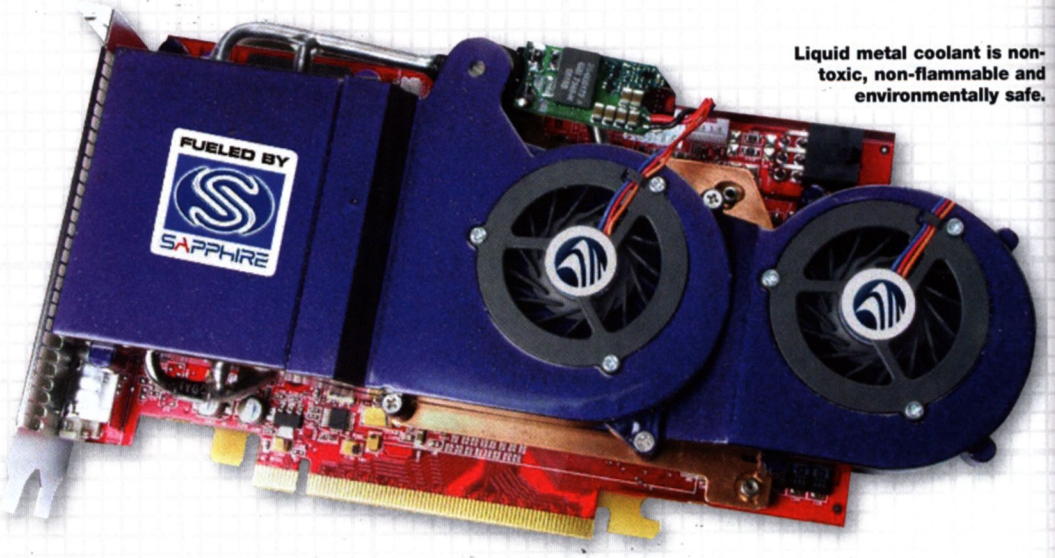
Playing more would make me play more better, but any improvement would be down to a familiarity with the maps and the way people herd along predictable routes – nothing to do with expert marksmanship. Playing more would also mean putting up with those inexplicable Steam updates, checkerboard textures and screwed-up decals, plus weird rotating 'ERROR' signs in the stress test and hacking players thanks to Valve Anti Cheat being crap. And in game, at busy choke points, smoke grenades, flash grenades and grenade grenades sailing overhead, with people firing randomly into the chaos – the point at which *CS* becomes fun – I know my frame-rate would go on holiday. For a full fortnight.

"Oh, yes, it's like that sometimes," said one helpful Fight Club fellow. "Don't worry about it, turn down your settings." Don't worry about it? Don't worry that there's a two-grand Alienware machine on my desk incapable of providing me with a two-digit frame-rate? Even though it aces every benchmark and hums like a substation?

The world's juiciest components and I have to slacken off the detail. It's enough to make a hardware guy cry. Think I'll stick with Photoshop.

FLUID METAL JACKET

Sapphire's new RADEON card cooled by ultra-smooth 'liquid metal'...



Liquid metal coolant is non-toxic, non-flammable and environmentally safe.

SAPPHIRE'S Blizzard RADEON X850 XT and X850 XT Platinum Edition promise lowest-ever temperatures for overclockers thanks to liquid metal technology, a substance 65 times more thermally conductive than water. An electromagnetic pump shifts the coolant from a plate over the RADEON GPU to a heat exchanger and back again, at great speed and without any noise whatsoever.

Because the apparatus is small-scale and contains no mechanical parts, power requirements are low and reliability problems are unlikely. Additionally, once the Blizzard units are filled and sealed with liquid metal at the factory, they require no user intervention – there's no need for cleaning, nor topping up reservoirs. Everything you need is integrated with the card, so all you need do is plug it in and power up.

With the boiling point of the metal coolant somewhere above 2,000 degrees celsius, even the most ardent overclocker will be hard pushed to fry the Blizzard system. However, you shouldn't forget that the technology is merely shifting the heat rather than eliminating it, albeit in a very clever manner, and so adequate case cooling remains a high priority.

Prices and release dates are not yet available, but if the application of the technology proves successful and liquid metal kits are made available to end users, there's every chance of it replacing today's noisy, space hungry, comparatively ineffective water cooling systems. You can find more at www.sapphiretech.com.

BOARD GAMES

PURE and simple...

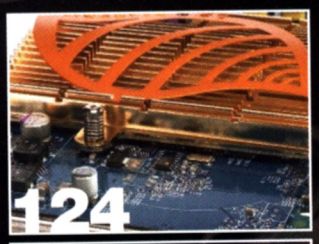
BUILDING ON its reputation as the leading supplier of RADEON cards, Sapphire has also confirmed plans to build 939-pin AMD motherboards for Athlon 64 and FX processors. Details are quite sketchy at the moment, but the new PURE range will be based around the ATI Express-200 chipset and includes hardware options such as dual video card support.

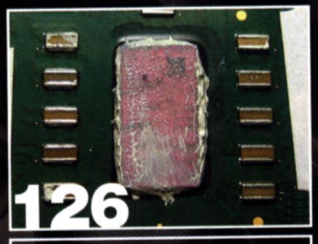
The PCIe boards will support up to 4GB of PC3200 RAM and will integrate LAN, Firewire and a healthy number of USB 2.0 ports, as well as on-board multi-channel surround sound and red flashing lights (probably). Expect support for IDE, SATA and RAID configurations.

Sapphire claims its PURE boards were designed after the company sought feedback from hardcore gamers, which might well be nonsense but it does hint at some saucy overclocking options in the BIOS.

Although no prices are available, nor a launch date set at present, the company has stressed it will be using "high quality components", which sounds like a prelude to a steep price tag. Best start saving then...


122
REVIEWS
Flat panel monitors on test

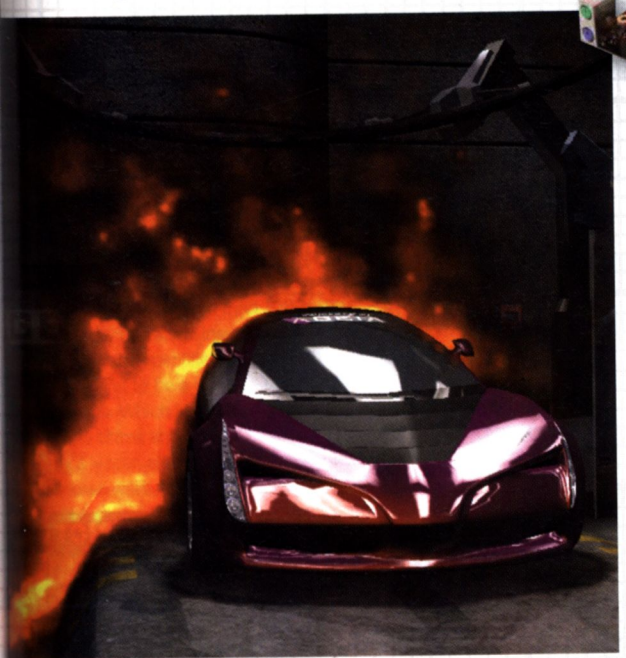

124
DEAR WANDY
Ease your woes here


126
WATCHDOG
You write, we bark. Loudly


128
BUYER'S GUIDE
Shop shop shop!

PHYSICAL EXERCISE

AGEIA demonstrates the power of its PhysX PPU and hints at cost



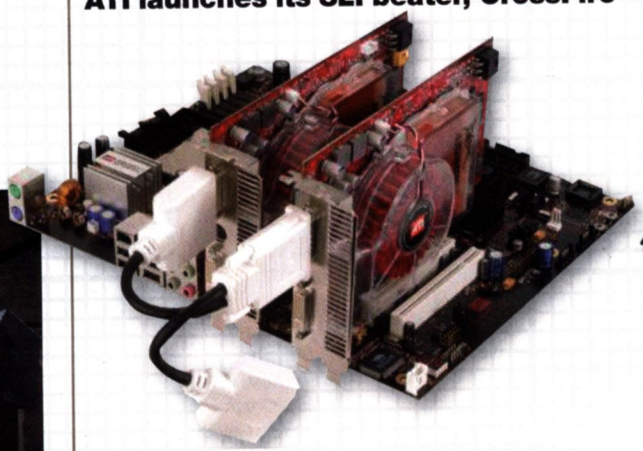
PhysX isn't just about making barrels topple over in a convincing manner. It means lifelike cloth, fluids and hair too.

LAST MONTH we brought you news of AGEIA's PhysX chip, a new form of processor dedicated to calculating the interaction of matter and energy in games. The idea is that by using it for hardware-accelerated physics, developers will be able to create environments much richer and more lifelike than ever before. If the company's demos are anything to go by, the PhysX will allow tens of thousands of individual game elements to react to one another – massively more than the hundred or so available in current titles.

We can now tell you that PhysX add-in cards should be available at stores in time for this Christmas, due to be priced at around £300, with ASUS already signed up to produce them. And given that AGEIA has relationships with Epic, Atari, Shiny Entertainment, Ubisoft and Microsoft, not to mention the dozen or so others it signed up at E3, it's quite likely we'll see the chip being made by a number of other manufacturing partners much like today's NVIDIA and ATI graphics hardware.

CROSS EXAMINED

ATI launches its SLI beater, CrossFire



Two DVI outputs are joined together with ATI's dongle. Results are said to be ahead of SLI.

HAVING scoffed at the way NVIDIA demands you buy two identical graphics cards, a new motherboard and games with SLI support to take advantage of its multi-GPU technology, ATI has now released CrossFire, its multi-VPU alternative with fewer handicaps. Although you won't be able to use it without spending money, it seems likely that a number of existing mainboards are already CrossFire-compatible. What's more, you won't have to download software patches or even new drivers to make it all work.

The only prerequisite is a 'master' RADEON, which comes supplied with a DVI+DVI dongle arrangement to attach to a 'slave'. Masters are currently available in two flavours: the X850 XT CrossFire Edition (CE) and X800 XL CE, costing $549 (about £305) and $299 (about £165) respectively. The X850 XT CE works with any X850 slave and the X800 XL CE with any X800. CrossFire does seem a slightly more elegant solution than SLI, and one which ATI promises will work with the games on your shelf. The company says CrossFire is noticeably faster than SLI, but after its claims about 512MB cards were proved largely false, you'd be better off waiting for benchmarks before you buy.

DRIVER WATCH

ON THE DVD

Need a patch? Take a look to see if you're behind the times

MOTHERBOARD

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Intel	INF Update Utility	7.0.0.1019	18-Apr-04	0.8MB	support.intel.com
NVIDIA	Unified Driver	71.89	17-Sep-04	26.8MB	nvidia.com
NVIDIA	nForce4 Standalone	6.53	17-Mar-05	31.3MB	nvidia.com
VIA	Hyperion 4in1	4.56v	12-Apr-04	1.4MB	viaarena.com NEW

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
ATI	Display, Control Panel, WDM	CATALYST 5.5	17-May-05	26.0MB	ati.com NEW
NVIDIA	Forceware	Release 71.89	14-Apr-05	17.9MB	nvidia.com

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	Audigy 4 Pro Beta Driver	Beta	28-Apr-05	19.72MB	uk.europe.creative.com NEW
M-Audio	Revolution	1.0.2.8	13-Feb-04	10.16MB	m-audio.com

NEWS ROUND-UP

The GIGABYTE **GA-8N-SLI Quad** is an Intel board that supports **four NVIDIA cards** thanks to the merger of two nForce4 SLI chipsets. No pricing is available yet, but if you can afford four GeForce 6800s it's not going to be an issue. Keep an eye on **uk.giga-byte.com**.



BFG released its 939-pin **nForce4 Ultra board**, the **BFGRNF4U**. Currently retailing for between $125-175 in the States, and receiving rave reviews, the board is not yet available in the UK. More at **www.bfgtech.com**.

BT has released free software which **alerts modem users** if your PC attempts to dial a blacklisted number. The **BT Privacy Online application** can be downloaded from **www.btmodemprotection.com**. An alternative is available from **www.antidialer.co.uk**.



Creative Labs is trumpeting its new **Xtreme Fidelity** audio processor, due to replace the ageing technology in today's Sound Blaster cards. **24 times** more powerful than its predecessor, and with a **fifth generation of EAX**, the X-Fi chip is likely to be the top choice for games. More at **www.creative.com**.



The **Zalman TNN 300** is a **totally silent** case featuring the company's own 350W **fanless power supply**. The optional remote control and multimedia suite support Windows Media Center Edition, making it ideal for your **lounge**. Details at **www.quietpc.com**.

And finally, a brief word of thanks to the delightful chaps at **HEXUS.net**, who have not only helped me out on numerous occasions, but who also have the best and largest UK hardware website.

FLAT OUT

Games look better if you see things *Phil Wand's* way...

FLAT PANEL MONITOR

MULTISYNC LCD1970GX

■ Price: £360 | Manufacturer: NEC Mitsubishi

nec-display-solutions.co.uk

Hey, good-lookin'...

PCZONE RECOMMENDED



SPECIFICATIONS
SCREEN SIZE 19-inches
RESOLUTION 1280x1024
RESPONSE 8ms
BRIGHT/CONT 400cd/sq.m./700:1
WEIGHT 7.4Kg
CONNECTIONS D-Sub, DVI, USB

PCZONE VERDICT
- ✔ A screen you want to lick
- ✔ 8ms's response time
- ✘ Not dear but still pricey
- ✘ No anti-glare surface

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Captivating

LCDS ARE pretty good these days. While there are differences between fast screens and slow ones, between value brands and established names, most of them leave a similar impression on your eyes. If you were to scrub off their stickers and line them up for inspection, the only way of telling them apart would be by getting lucky.

There are exceptions. Even without any identifying marks, the LCD1970GX here would be a dead giveaway, its screen looking like the granite tombstone of an aristocrat. NEC engineers have polished and blackened the glass to help saturate the colours and darken the shadows, all of which means that the image on it is easily the most charismatic of all the panels here.

Other reasons to choose the NEC include a joystick controller for the on-screen display, four-port USB hub, plus an 8ms response and class-leading brightness and contrast. There were no dead pixels to contend with, and having tested the LCD1970GX in many games and with DVDs, there was no obvious afterglow. There's even a way of adjusting the display from the desktop with NEC's NaViSet utility.

XTREME VX924

■ Price: £380 | Manufacturer: ViewSonic | viewsonic.co.uk

Plain Jane, but fine all the same...



VIEWSONIC makes some of the best-looking screens around – but this VX924 isn't one of them. Next to the suave VP171s (issue 153, 90%), it's just too ordinary, the oval logo on its back as large as the oval logo on a Mondeo. If you catch my drift.

But such styling has its benefits. The front buttons are plainly marked and well sized – the horrid fiddly things on the VP171s look as though they were borrowed from a Casio C-801 calculator watch. The base is also very sturdy, even if it lacks the height and swivel adjust of the NEC and LG.

The talking point is the unit's response: just 4ms, a time which ViewSonic engineers claim gives motion video performance to rival CRTs. And that may be the case, but neither the 8ms NEC nor the 12ms LG exhibit symptoms to suggest they're any slower. At this level, picture quality is of greater importance, and here the VX924 is indistinguishable from the worthy but dull LG. I'll take the NEC, please.

SPECIFICATION
SCREEN SIZE 19-inches
RESOLUTION 1280x1024
RESPONSE 4ms
BRIGHT/CONT 270cd/sq.m./550:1
WEIGHT 6.7Kg
CONNECTIONS D-Sub, DVI

PCZONE VERDICT
- ✔ The ultimate gaming screen
- ✔ Sturdy and finger-friendly
- ✘ Lacks height, swivel adjust
- ✘ Ordinary looks

84

Gamers rejoice

FLATRON L1950H

■ Price: £295 | Manufacturer: LG | uk.lge.com

Where's the va-va-voom?



FROM TEN paces the NEC and LG are identical. They have the same 19-inches, the same narrow bezel, the same round base and angular stand. But step closer and you can see how the NEC's lustrous screen produces images richer in colour and deeper in shadow. Side by side, the LCD1970GX draws to you it like a circus poster, whereas the L1950H delivers a sharp but plainly less interesting picture.

The LG also loses out in the battle of on-screen displays. Aside from lacking the joystick of the NEC, and thus being as counter-intuitive as every other monitor, its auto-sizing is astonishingly backward. It took me nine or ten stabs of buttons before my desktop stopped looking like a corrupt JPEG and locked to the edges of the glass. I still don't know what I did.

The L1950H has all the hallmarks of a fine screen and isn't afraid of games, but LG has been left behind by the competition. Couldn't the user interface be better? Where's the USB hub? This is a screen best left at the office.

SPECIFICATION
SCREEN SIZE 19-inches
RESOLUTION 1280x1024
RESPONSE 12ms
BRIGHT/CONT 250cd/sq.m./500:1
WEIGHT 6.7Kg
CONNECTIONS D-Sub, DVI

PCZONE VERDICT
- ✔ Handsome and solid
- ✔ Performs well in games, films
- ✘ Drab alongside the NEC
- ✘ Analogue annoyances

79

Good, but not the best

RADEON X800 XL 512MB

■ Price: £275 | Manufacturer: Sapphire | www.sapphiretech.com

RAM overload? For now, yes...

THIS IS a nice card, but a nice card which is less useful than an Amish phonebook. Doubling the onboard memory to equal what many people have on their motherboard can indeed increase performance, but Sapphire's 512MB X800 XL shows there are only a very small number of scenarios where that increase becomes obvious. I've run and re-run the benchmarks, and only in *Half-Life 2*, at resolutions beyond the capabilities of most monitors, with detail settings which leave the game jerky and unplayable anyway, does the XXL XL make its £50 price hike seem worthwhile. In every other test (and contrary to ATI's official benchmarks), the card is barely distinguishable from any cheaper 256MB variant.

More memory does mean it's now possible to use larger and more complex textures to boost levels of realism; it also allows increasingly complex post-processing effects to be applied without them being detrimental to a game's overall frame-rate. But since hardly anyone runs at more than 1280x1024, with only a small minority of people insisting on the maximum dose of anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering, and with High Dynamic Range Rendering (HDR) yet to be a relevant factor, the 512MB card is strictly for loonies. Which is a shame, because the loonies already have their 6800 Ultras and X850 XT Platinum Editions and won't be tempted by a lesser, slower product, regardless of how much RAM it comes with.



FUTURE SOUND OF RADEON

It was somewhat ironic that the card to which I compared the 512MB, its sibling rival X800 XL Ultimate Edition 256MB, emerged from testing as the clear winner. Great performance, low cost and a rather beautiful, near silent, Zalman cooler made the choice very easy for me – it's also closer to £200 and far better value.

But while the Ultimate Edition triumphs, that's not to say Sapphire's 512MB alternative is totally without merit. Developers don't make games for today's hardware, as anyone who bought *Far Cry* last April will tell you, and the fat RADEON was designed with tomorrow in mind. If you think back, it wasn't too long ago that we all had 64MB cards in our machines and laughed at anyone reckless enough to spend the extra for 128MB; now that you can buy 256MB cards for under a ton, 512MB is simply the next rung up the ladder. Some day soon we'll take all that RAM for granted, but here and now you don't need it.

SPECIFICATION

HARDWARE 512MB GDDR-3 ATI RADEON X800 XL
ANCILLARIES 1 x VGA to DVI converter, S-video cable, composite cable, S-video to composite adaptor, power splitter, VIVO whip
BUNDLE *Prince Of Persia*, PowerDVD 5, PowerDirector 3, Installation CD

PCZONE VERDICT

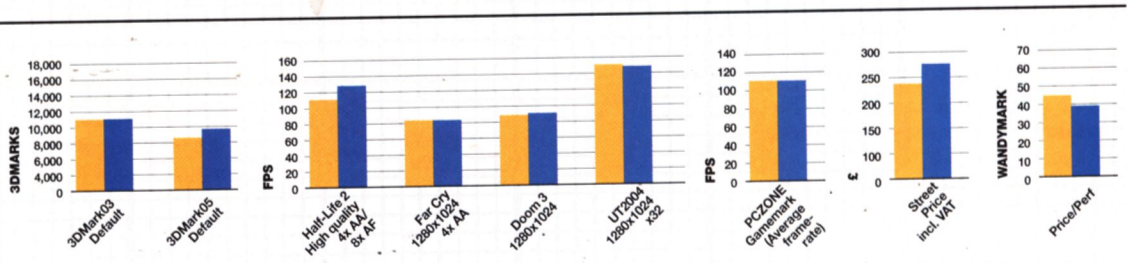
- ✔ Underlying XL technology
- ✔ Source performance, VIVO
- ✘ Mostly identical to the 256MB
- ✘ X850 XT similar money

75

May prove useful at some future time

SAPPHIRE X800 XL 256MB ULTIMATE

SAPPHIRE X800 XL 512MB



The **COMBINED SCORE** is an average of a number of real-world gaming tests and bespoke benchmarking tools. The **WANDYMARK™** is the combined average score divided by the price.



DEAR WANDY

Don't be scared of the machines – they are our friends. But if you've had a falling out with yours, why not write in to Wandy and let him sort you out? He's clever like that...

■ **MR FIXIT** Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us and in turn, we may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in type thing. If you have any **top tips** to share with the group, then send them in too: if Wandy's impressed, he'll print them and send you **£50** for your trouble.

Write to Dear Wandy, *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.

Email Address your letters to us at wandy@dearwandy.com with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we're unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

FROM THE THRONE ROOM

Q Talk about contradiction. Poor old Andrew Tumelty writes asking how and why companies like Dell get away offering a great system at one price (as we said in issue153), only to flank you with extras that inflate the cost enormously.

Well, your advice may have been well intentioned, but you do realise you did exactly the same thing? Your advice spent £1,000 on parts excluding monitor, case, PSU, keyboard and mouse, HDD, FDD, CD-ROM and speakers. I've built great machines for my mates for under a grand where necessary – and by that I mean all in!

The best advice I could offer anyone building a system is to use your Buyer's Guide. You can work to different budgets with it, and spend your money where it counts. By the way, your column is the first I read when on the throne. Keep up the good work.

Tim Roberts

A It's a fair comment that in pricing up systems, I regularly omit the cost of components such as the case and the screen. But there are good reasons for that. To start with, it's simply not practical to list absolutely everything you require to build a PC from scratch. Not only would it run across several columns into Watchdog, but I wouldn't know where to stop.

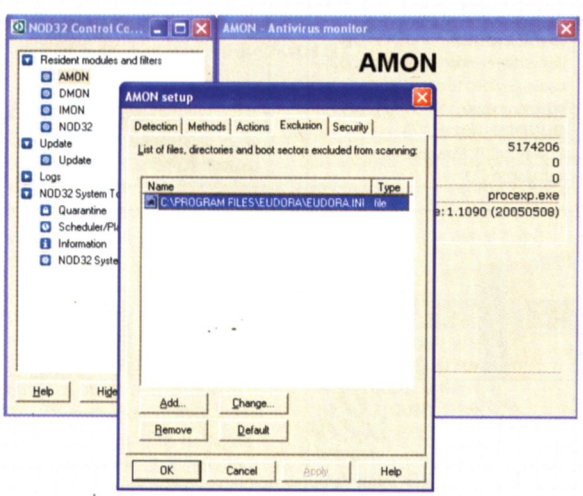
I mean, should I include the keyboard? A floppy drive? What about ribbon cables? A heat sink? Decent thermal material to replace the dog snot that Intel uses? Copy of Windows? Copy of *Viz* while it's installing? Unless a letter demands a step-by-step response, I have to assume some degree of expertise and that people understand their system comprises a lot more than just a motherboard, processor and MP3 files.

Then there's the fact that the overwhelming majority of people who ask me what components I would choose already own a PC, or have built systems before and so often have a stack of stuff they can migrate across.

Lastly, even if you were to tot up the remaining odds and sods, the total remains a lot less than you would spend on a ready-built system with a badge on the front. You're also exaggerating a little in accusing me of excluding the cost of the monitor, when my reply to Andrew's letter stated that he should "look around for one of the new 8ms flat panels" and that he should expect to pay "somewhere between £250 and £290".

That aside, and as I said at the start, it's a pretty fair comment. In future I think I will add an arbitrary figure – between £150 and £200 – to cover the cost of the case, storage and peripherals.

To troubleshoot high CPU usage, try excluding files from AMON. Open NOD32, click AMON, then Setup and open the Exclusions tab.



THANKS FOR THE MEMORY

Q When I built my PC around 18 months ago, I used an ASRock K7S8XE motherboard and a single 512MB stick of Crucial DDR400 RAM. Video and processing power are courtesy of a Hercules RADEON 9800 PRO and AMD Athlon 3200+. I've been very pleased with the performance throughout *Far Cry*, *Doom 3*, *Half-Life 2* and so on. The only upgrade I've been thinking about is memory. The board will support a maximum of 1GB DDR400, or 2GB DDR333, or 3GB DDR266. What's the best option?

Les Denovan

A In all my experience of playing all manner of games on all manner of different PCs, there is no obvious advantage to having any more than 1GB RAM. There is a significant improvement in performance between 512MB and 1GB, and of course even more between 256MB and 1GB, but there's no point having buckets and buckets of the stuff, even if it is quite cheap these days.

Unless you're editing video clips, encoding and broadcasting, or running a server with a huge SQL database on it, buy yourself an additional PC3200 (DDR400) chip and be done with it.

NOD KNOLL

Q On your advice I've gone and bought NOD32 and as an anti-virus tool it's great. However, my CPU started running at 100 per cent all the time. Checking Task Manager showed the culprit to be tcpsvcs.exe. NOD32 support pointed me towards a website explaining different Window processes, but this wasn't very helpful. I checked some forums and found I was not alone with the problem, but the only solution seems to be to stop tcpsvcs running. I've done that and the problem seems solved.

I thought you should know since you trumpet the virtues of NOD32 and might want to include a warning to others. Also, can you let me know if turning off this program could be a bad idea for any reason?

Phil Grainger

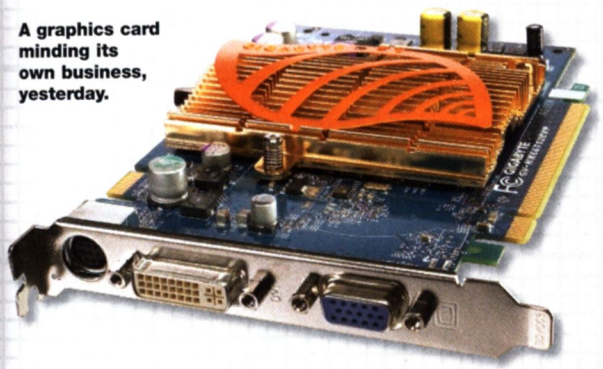
A Sadly, there are no guarantees with hardware or software. Only recently I recommended a Buffalo router to a friend, having been a fan of Buffalo gear for millions of years, only to have him bring the box round the next day saying he'd spent the evening cussing at it. It would power up, and by all outward appearances was working as it should (ie the lights were on and it didn't smell funny), but the little hamster inside had fallen off the wheel. After poking it and prodding it I came to the conclusion it was FUBAR, DOA, POS. Great.

I have similar stories to tell about ZyXEL firewalls, Western Digital hard drives, Hitachi monitors, Sony TVs, Panasonic vacuum cleaners – seemingly every one of my preferred brands has a horror story to go with it. I have to console myself with the fact that even the good stuff goes wrong.

And that's just how it is with NOD32. For me, the one trouble I have with the program is the way its AMON component interacts with my ancient copy of Eudora – I need to exclude my EUDORA.INI file from its scans, else the CPU leaps to 100 per cent and Eudora falls flat on its face.

So you may find that adding tcpsvcs.exe to the same exclusions list helps you out, but if disabling the service works for you, stay with it. You may also like to open your Network Places, right-click on your network connection and choose Properties, and see if you have 'Microsoft TCP/IP

"Your system would have been the fastest and most expensive thing ever when you bought it. Now, with the X850XT it'll really fly. You lucky, lucky bastard..."



A graphics card minding its own business, yesterday.

version 6' listed as a protocol. If so, remove it.

ASUS SK8V AGP? THX

Q I've just saved enough money to buy a X850XT Platinum Edition. I can't afford to go the PCI-Express route just yet, so I'm going to upgrade my graphics card instead – as you probably know, the big RADEON is now available with an AGP interface. My PC specs are as follows: Athlon FX-53, 1GB RAM, Radeon 9800XT all on an ASUS SK8V motherboard. What I'd like to know is, will my motherboard be OK with the X850XT or will I need to upgrade this as well?

Jon McMillan

A No wonder you don't have the funds to move to PCI-Express – that system of yours would have been the fastest and most gravely expensive thing on four rubber feet back when you bought it. And now the X850XT will really make it fly, you lucky, lucky bastard.

Anyway, no, I don't foresee any problems. Graphics cards aren't like processors or memory, in that you don't need to peer too closely to know they'll work with your PC. As long as you have an AGP board (you do), and make sure you buy the AGP variant (you will), the only thing you need to worry about is keeping it fed with electricity. Do make sure your PSU has a 380W rating and at least 20A shown on its +12V rail (see issue 154). Email the benchmarks when you're done.

TURBO NUTTER

Q I'm thinking about upgrading my Dell 4300, which currently stands at 1.8GHz, 512MB with a 64MB Geforce3 Ti200. I'm going for 1GB RAM and a 3.2GHz Pentium because I already have a P4 motherboard. But I'm not sure what graphics card to get. Currently it's between the Sparkle 6600GT and the RADEON X700 PRO. Which one is better? They're around the same price online and the only major difference I can see is that the RADEON is 256MB whereas the NVIDIA is 128MB. Does this make the RADEON better?

Richard Thesiger

A While the Sparkle is a super card, the GIGABYTE GV-NX66T128VP Comprehensive Golly Nutcase from our Buyer's Guide will give you better results because it comes tweaked from the factory – it's also in the same price range.

As for the difference between 128MB and 256MB, it's not something you'd notice unless you pile on the detail. And if you do that to a mainstream card, you're going to be disappointed with both. Only the more recent 512MB flagship products seem to be capable of producing benchmark scores that make the price hike worthwhile.

MILES BEHIND

Q I'm sure a lot of people say this but... I'm at my wit's end. My system is a 2700+ Athlon GeForce FX5900XT Golden Sample with 512MB RAM and an A7N8X2 motherboard running Windows 2000. When I run *Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault*, I get this message: The procedure entry point _RIB_provider_library_handle@0 could not be located in the dynamic link library mss32.dll.

I duly phoned EA's support line who were very helpful. They suggested updating all graphics drives and Forceware for my motherboard. I've done that. Then they told me to uninstall the game, reinstall and try again. I've done that too. They said maybe the DVD drive didn't write the game to the HDD properly. Another guy said that it was a Winamp problem. I downloaded and bought PC Rescue – a program which claims to solve DLL errors on your machine – but still nothing was solved.

The guy at EA suggested looking for mss32.dll on the Internet and downloading it to system32. I did that and nothing happened. So not only have I spent £25 on the game, another £20 on PC Rescue and another £20 on phone calls, but my problem still isn't solved. Do you have any suggestions?

Andy Morris

A DLL file contains a collection of software routines called functions. These chunks of code help applications and games perform a variety of different but very specific tasks, such as displaying graphics, doing physics calculations, or just sending stuff back and forth over the Internet. In your case, _RIB_provider_library_handle@0 is the name of a function inside mss32.dll, a library file which accompanies the Miles Sound System. Not being a Miles developer I've no idea what the function actually does, but at this level you don't need to know.

My first stop was the Miles home page at radgametools.com. After a brief hunt around, I nabbed the Miles Sound Player from its download page on the assumption it would come with the latest version of mss32.dll version 6.6g – which it did. I then used a Microsoft program called Depends – it's one of the tools accompanying Visual Studio.NET 2003 – to peek inside the DLL and see the functions it contains. From what I could make out, version 6.6g simply doesn't have _RIB_provider_library_handle@0 anywhere inside it, and if you're using that version of the DLL then any call to the entry point will raise an error.

However, on my travels I've managed to find version 5.0r at www.dll-files.com, which Depends says has the requisite code tucked away inside it. So my suggestion would be to get shot of any existing mss32.dll in your system directory and try replacing any others in your *Medal Of Honor* game directory with 5.0r. That should sort you out nicely.



Which graphics card to choose? Decisions...

AUTOEXEC TNT

Q My PC is a 2.8MHz Pentium, 512MB RAM, GeForce 5200 running Windows XP Home.

My problem started after a bout of spring cleaning in which I updated, deleted and scanned every square inch of my PC.

Now when I try to install games I receive this message: C:\WINDOWS\system32\AUTOEXEC.NT. The system file is not suitable for running MS-DOS and Microsoft Windows applications. I've tried System Restore and Microsoft's Help and Support, but with no joy. Considering I'm practically PC illiterate, your help would be much appreciated because I'm stumped as to what to do next.

Philip Dunne

A You've managed to delete AUTOEXEC.NT from its rightful place in the system32 folder. Either copy it back from C:\WINDOWS\repair, or if you've managed to delete that too, expand it from your original Windows CD. Put the XP disc into the drive, then click Start, choose Run, and type the following command: expand d:\i386\autoexec.nt_ c:\windows\system32\autoexec.nt

If your CD drive is something other than d:, you'll need to change the first drive letter in the command appropriately. If you're still stuck, drop into the Dear Wandy forums and I'll email you the right file. PCZ

Visit Wandy on the Web at www.dearwandy.com



WATCHDOG

Crooked chips, messed-up machines, pathetic power connectors: it's not easy sorting out such problems every month, but Watchdog is always happy to fight your corner...

■ **TAKING NO PRISONERS** Suzy Wallace

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry – we're here to help when you're at the end of your tether. If you've got a consumer issue that needs addressing, why not drop us a line?

WRITE TO Watchdog, *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.
EMAIL Alternatively, email us at mailbox@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'.

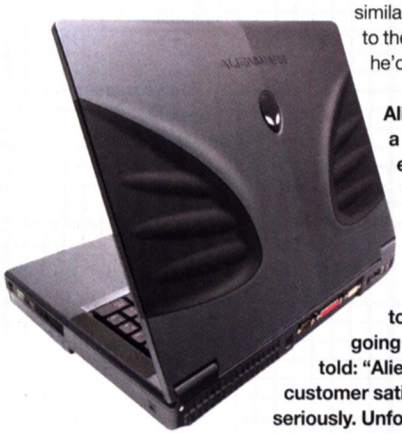
READ ME!

If you're writing in to complain about a product, please send us your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure that you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers.

TAKE ME TO YOUR DEALER

Most of us would be fainting with delight if we got to own an Alienware machine, but not Alex Jaber. He purchased three Alienware laptops, but when the first arrived, "the promotional T-shirt appeared cheap and was delivered in the wrong size, and the Sound Blaster NX was delivered with a UK power cable as opposed to a German one". More importantly though, the system "had a pixel error in the centre of the screen... And was wrongly assembled".

The other two systems arrived without flaws, but after a couple of weeks began to overheat and the external soundcards started to play up. To make matters worse, Alex was in the Middle East at the time and so had to wait to return to Europe before he could discuss replacements. And when he did, he was told that the specs of the replacement machines weren't to be of a similar financial value to the original systems he'd bought.

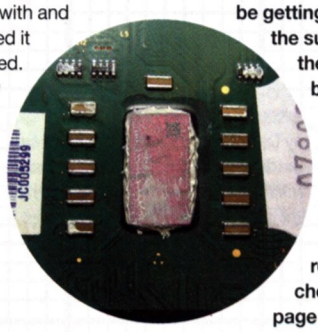


Alienware's not a company you'd expect to see gracing the pages of Watchdog, so we promptly got in contact to see what was going on. We were told: "Alienware takes customer satisfaction very seriously. Unfortunately, there are times when certain product specifications or components are unavailable, as was the case concerning Mr Jaber. However, we're delighted that we were able to resolve this issue and supply Mr Jaber with a satisfactory replacement system. We would also like apologise to Mr Jaber for any inconvenience and reassure all Alienware customers that we're committed to offering the very best in customer service at all times."

CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

Fabian Campbell-West recently purchased an OEM Athlon XP 3200 chip from online store www.gladiatorcomputers.com. After it was delivered, he hurriedly unwrapped his parcel but when he inspected the chip a little closer, something wasn't right. The chip looked like it had been tampered with and Fabian suspected it of being remarked.

If you're now scratching your head wondering what I'm talking about, remarking is the term for a chip that 'has been tampered with to increase its performance beyond that which it was at the time of its shipment from AMD'. It's the computing equivalent of a car salesman selling you a Fiesta when you thought you'd bought an Aston Martin. Fabian complained and returned the chip to Gladiator, who took it and tested it. However, its results showed no problem, so it was promptly returned to Fabian. Understandably, he's not exactly impressed with owning a chip that's not really what it says on the box.



Now I'm not exactly a hardware expert, but even I could see that the chip looked like it had been put together by Bob the Builder. We quickly got in contact with someone at AMD to get their opinion on the chip. Sure enough, a couple of days later the company informed us that it too believed the chip to be a remark, and a pretty shoddy one at that. We got back in touch with Gladiator Computers, who informed us that now AMD had confirmed the chip as a remark, it would be getting in touch with the supplier, giving them a swift boot up the arse and refunding Fabian in full. If you suspect a chip of being remarked, check out this page on AMD's site: www.amd.com/pibsecurity.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Peter Appleby's been enjoying his Dell Inspiron laptop since he bought it in January of last year, but come this March, the power connector at the back suddenly stopped accepting power. "On closer examination, two of the four strips of metal inside the port that form the connection with the power supply had come off."

Of course, he got straight in touch with Dell who informed him that to fix the problem, his laptop would require a new motherboard, but that he'd have to fund it himself as the system was now out of warranty.

Now, Peter's aware that Dell's within its legal rights to refuse to fix the system: "However, if the problem had arisen in a heavily-used part, like the keyboard or touchpad, then it may have been slightly more acceptable. But the power port is a basic part of the laptop, and, having paid over £1,000, it's right to expect a reasonable level of build quality in these basic components."

We got in contact with Dell, who quite predictably stated: "In this case, Mr Appleby did not choose to take up the extended warranty and therefore received our standard 12-month warranty. We've explained to Mr Appleby that his system is now out of warranty and therefore is liable for any costs arising from repairing and/or providing replacement parts to this system."

Funnily enough, when we shot back an email asking if Dell wished to comment on the matter of the power supply being faulty after only 14 months, things went quiet and that was the last we heard from the company. A guilty conscience perhaps?

"Now I'm no expert, but even I could see that the chip looked like it had been put together by Bob the Builder"

THE ACCUSED

ALIENWARE
Gladiator Computers
DELL

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

amazon.co.uk

▲ **GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE IS SOMETHING WE ALWAYS APPLAUD...**

Yann Ryan wants to sing the praises of Internet behemoth Amazon.co.uk – and rightly so. He purchased a Flash memory card from the company, but when it arrived it was faulty. He emailed Amazon straight away requesting a replacement, but with this being the first thing he'd ordered online and having heard several horror stories, he expected the worst and settled in for the long haul. However, within hours he received a reply stating that not only had a replacement already been ordered, but that: "As the cost of returning the package is in this case prohibitively expensive, we ask that you keep the original item with our compliments. Perhaps you would like to donate it to a charity in your area if you feel it would be appropriate to do so." Keeping the original? Charity donations? Next thing you know they'll be giving stuff away!

▼



PSW

OFFICIAL! THE UK'S BEST-SELLING INDEPENDENT PLAYSTATION MAG

ON SALE NOW!



BUYER'S GUIDE

Everyone likes shopping – especially when it involves new graphics cards and motherboards...

Whether you want a new graphics card, motherboard or joystick, this is where to look to find the best on the market. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product that will satisfy no matter what you play. Our Recommended product wears a silver medal, not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but a worthy alternative. Finally, the Also Consider product is one we believe you should look at too before making your final decision. If you feel we've got something wrong, missed out a great product or just want to add your own words of wisdom, mail letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on your suggestion, we might even send you a gift. We're nice like that.

MOTHERBOARDS

EDITOR'S CHOICE



A8V DELUXE WIRELESS
STREET PRICE £82
MANUFACTURER ASUSTeK
TELEPHONE 0870 1208 340
WEBSITE uk.asus.com

For the first time, an AMD board takes gold. Based on the VIA K8T800 Pro chipset, the ASUS A8V supports 939-pin Athlon 64 and FX processors (the engines behind the best gaming systems), and up to 4GB of dual-channel PC3 200 RAM. Onboard dual RAID, 7.1 sound, automated overclocking and AGP8X complete the picture. The Wireless Edition comes bundled with more.

RECOMMENDED



KN1 EXTREME NEW ENTRY
STREET PRICE: £96
MANUFACTURER: ECS
TELEPHONE: N/A
WEBSITE: www.ecs.uk.com

One of the cheaper nForce4 Ultra boards, the KN1 Extreme offers all the benefits of expensive 939-pin AMD64 mobos for under a ton. As well as two integrated cooling fans, the KN1 features ten USB ports, support for six SATA devices, RAID, onboard audio and an external USB-based 802.11g wireless adaptor. ECS is known for good value and this is no exception. Also, overclocking features have been added in BIOS updates.

ALSO CONSIDER



K8N NEO2 PLATINUM WAS £91 NOW £88
STREET PRICE £88
MANUFACTURER Micro-Star
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE msicomputer.co.uk

MSI's K8N Neo has always boasted stability and performance, and the new 939-pin, nForce3 Ultra variant is just as impressive. The Neo2 supports the new Athlon 64 and FX-53 processors and incorporates a dual-channel memory controller. The board includes 7.1 sound, Gigabit LAN, 8 USB 2.0 ports, 2 x ATA and 4 x SATA connectors. Multi-function RAID is also standard.

PROCESSORS

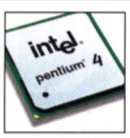
EDITOR'S CHOICE



ATHLON 64 3500
STREET PRICE £174
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE 01276 803100
WEBSITE www.amd.com

Now the 939-pin chips no longer require registered memory, the AMD64 route is a cheaper option. Smash open your old Pentium PC, snatch the PC3200 sticks from its banks and mate them with a new Athlon on an A8V Deluxe. Although the Hyper-Threading alternatives can be better for business and encoding apps, the 64-bit chips are great for gaming, the 3500 giving best value. Die-hard Intel fans are missing out.

RECOMMENDED



P4 3.2GHZ
STREET PRICE £140
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403000
WEBSITE www.intel.com

If you're desperate for an Intel-inside, the 3.2GHz still packs a hefty punch. Hyper-Threading delivers a jaw-pounding, double-whammy power hit that pushes benchmark scores well ahead of the equivalent Athlon, and an 800MHz front-side bus paired with the right memory can make its presence felt. If you have a P4 motherboard, you're already set for an upgrade to remember.

ALSO CONSIDER



ATHLON 64 4000+ WAS £351 NOW £346
STREET PRICE £346
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE 01276 803100
WEBSITE www.amd.com

Although the FX-55 is AMD's hottest tamale, it's more expensive than the 939-pin, 2.4GHz, ClawHammer-based Athlon 64 4000+ chip. And if you're thinking those specs look oddly familiar, full marks: the 4000+ is a rebadged FX-53 with its price shaved by £50, making it the slightly saner choice. Mind you, if you're looking to spend this kind of money, finding the extra nifty for the full-on FX-55 might not be an issue...

HDDS

EDITOR'S CHOICE



WD1200JB 120GB
STREET PRICE £51
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

You may well view a 120GB HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hangar-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8MB cache and a speed of 7200RPM.

RECOMMENDED



DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB
STREET PRICE £36
MANUFACTURER Maxtor
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.maxtor.com

The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that pricey. 80GB is more than adequate for work, play and downloading requirements, and if you're greedy for more gig you can jump up a size. The Fast ATA, 7200RPM drive includes Maxtor's Shock Protection System and Quiet Drive Technology, but for the Serial ATA version, expect to pay a £20 premium.

ALSO CONSIDER



RAPTOR 36GB
STREET PRICE £73
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.

GRAPHICS CARDS

EDITOR'S CHOICE



GEFORCE 6800 GT
STREET PRICE £299
MANUFACTURER XFX Graphics
TELEPHONE 01327 315750
WEBSITE www.xfxforce.co.uk

The release of *Doom 3* means that NVIDIA couldn't have timed its return to the top better. The 6800 GT is a slight step down from its über-Ultra card in terms of performance (only by a few frames per second), but at under £300 it gives you much better value for money. If you can afford the not insignificant outlay, this is the card to buy – and your games will love you forever.

RECOMMENDED



GV-NX66T128VP TURBO FORCE
STREET PRICE £131
MANUFACTURER GIGABYTE
TELEPHONE 01908 362700
WEBSITE uk.giga-byte.com

A fanless heat-pipe arrangement keeps this GeForce cool and silent. GIGABYTE claims a 38% speed hike over a regular card – not quite, but the boost is noticeable – it's the fastest 6600GT we've tested. *Thief: Deadly Shadows* and *Joint Ops: Typhoon Rising* come bundled, and the card has full VIVO capabilities – PowerDirector comes free. A stunning card at a stunning price.

ALSO CONSIDER



RADEON X700 PRO 256MB WAS £150 NOW £130
STREET PRICE £130
MANUFACTURER Sapphire
WEBSITE www.saphiretech.com

Hot on the heels of the 6600GT is Sapphire's X700 Pro, featuring PCI-Express, GDDR-3 memory, 8 pixel pipelines and a 128-bit interface. It's a quality product bundled with quality games, and in benchmarks has no trouble keeping up with the runaway GeForce. Unlike the 6600GT, there's no AGP counterpart and it's more money. But if you're looking for a RADEON and maximum mainstream grunt, this is the card for you.

SOUNDCARDS

EDITOR'S CHOICE



REVOLUTION 7.1 WAS £90 NOW £80
STREET PRICE £80
MANUFACTURER M-Audio
TELEPHONE 0871 7177 100
WEBSITE www.maudio.co.uk

Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.

RECOMMENDED



AUDIGY 2 ZS
STREET PRICE £58
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96KHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy gives you an experience like no other.

ALSO CONSIDER



AUDIGY 2 ZS PLATINUM PRO WAS £144 NOW £170
STREET PRICE £170
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

With the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Pro is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other. The external breakout box is a boon for serious listeners, including standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 firewire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.

◀ EDITOR'S CHOICE ▶ ◀ RECOMMENDED ▶ ◀ ALSO CONSIDER ▶

MICE



MX510
STREET PRICE £30
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0217
WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

The best example of the MX optical engine, the MX510 is ideal for gaming. Logitech has upped the rate of the MX500's image processing from 4.7 megapixels per second to 5.8, meaning greater accuracy and smoother movements. It's also increased acceleration from 10g to 15g, meaning lag-free responses. The scroll wheel is nicely ratcheted and although it's heavier than the slimline MX310, it's well balanced for quick movements in FPSs.



OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE
STREET PRICE £17
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

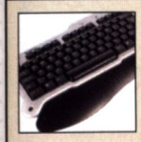
If you've ever been boggled by the number of buttons on a mouse and have fond memories of a time when three-clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold and, as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. Plus, the latest optical technology means it works anywhere.



MX700
WAS £47 NOW £40
STREET PRICE £40
MANUFACTURER ACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent – making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. However, it's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash.

KEYBOARDS



PC GAMING KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £35
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com/uk

A simple yet elegant design, with variable backlit keys and peerless build quality make the PC Gaming Keyboard a very desirable object. The keys are weighted perfectly and are ideal for late-night gaming because they hardly make a sound. Rubber pads stop the thing sliding away from you, and the silver Saitek comes with a programmable command pad which can be positioned to both suit lefties and righties. Finger heaven.



INTERNET NAVIGATOR
STREET PRICE £21
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and feel nicer. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the Web a cinch – you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back.



PRO KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £46
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 0800 0391 010
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

If you think we're mad for including an Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and, with the help of third-party utilities, disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons.

JOYSTICKS



CYBORG EVO
WAS £25 NOW £30
STREET PRICE £30
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A welcome new look for Saitek, with the welcome addition of a four-way adjustable head, larger buttons, plus a meaty damped throttle at the back of the base. As with all Cyborgs, the sculpted hand-rests can be repositioned ambidextrously and suit all hand sizes. An eight-way hat switch, five thumb buttons with trigger, four base buttons and a shift key to double the possible combinations make this a winner.



CYBORG 3D GOLD
STREET PRICE £22
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A former Best Buy, the Saitek stick is renowned for the way it can be taken apart and put back together to fit your hand perfectly, and also for its ambidextrous nature – lefties as well as righties can get to grips with it. It features seven fire buttons and, like the Sidewinder, has eight hat buttons, a lever throttle and a twist grip for controlling the rudder. At this price, you'd be daft not to.



HOTAS COUGAR
STREET PRICE £249
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

The John Holmes of joysticks. Based on the flight controls of an F-16, sturdy metal construction makes it feel like no other peripheral. With 28 customisable buttons, 18lbs of resistance built into its springs, programmable hat switches and an adaptive action for the separate throttle arm, it transforms any flight simulation and is the ultimate toy for wannabe pilots. It's ten times the cost of a regular joystick, but is in a class of its own.

SPEAKERS



INSPIRE P580 5.1
STREET PRICE £56
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

We don't like the idea of blowing a ton on speakers, chiefly because the mid-range Creative products are so good. You could spend a little more on a 7.1 set, but you'd lose out on space – and there's little benefit for games players. Instead, stick to the six-speaker P580s, which deliver crisp bass from the subwoofer and a clean, bright sound from the satellites. What's more, this latest design includes a headphone jack too.



Z-640
STREET PRICE £58
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Logitech has patented the pressure-driver design of its subwoofer and we can hear the difference. For the money, the clout is simply amazing – if you're a basshead, you'll love it. Higher frequencies don't disappoint either, the 5.1 sounding almost as clean and inviting as the Inspire 5300s. Unlike the Creative set, the Z-640 has a headphone socket, but it's not conveniently sited. Shame.



MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550
WAS £180 NOW £175
STREET PRICE £180
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Successor to our Best Performance winner, the Megaworks 550 is a stunning 5.1 setup with five 70W capsule-shielded satellite speakers, a 150W wood subwoofer and a wired remote with a separate headphone socket. Built to THX standards, the sound quality is superb in DVDs and games – Creative's BASH system providing 500W of power that make you leap out of your seat.

SCREENS



VP171S
WAS £250 NOW £245
STREET PRICE £245
MANUFACTURER ViewSonic
TELEPHONE 01293 643900
WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

With a response time of 8ms and both DVI and analog inputs, this ViewSonic LCD was always going to be best suited to gamers. Images are sharp and richly saturated, with a huge range of contrast and brightness. A thin bezel makes it ideal for multi-monitor setups. Height adjust, tilt, swivel and even pivot means the 17-inch screen can be put anywhere and made to suit anyone. The only problem is the fiddly buttons on the front.



FLATRON L1730P
STREET PRICE £355
MANUFACTURER LG
TELEPHONE 0870 585000
WEBSITE uk.lg.com

If you're after speed, quality and features, the 17-inch Flatron L1730P is the one to covet. It boasts a 12ms response time, has an amazing picture, a range of colour presets, detachable two-port USB hub and is TCO-03 compliant to boot. This accreditation means there's height and tilt adjust, plus the screen is lit uniformly – it's noticeably a superior image. The only drawback is the price, and the pivot feature won't interest gamers.



VISIONMASTER PRO 514
WAS £398 NOW £425
STREET PRICE £425
MANUFACTURER Iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Boasting a 22-inch Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDTRON tube, 0.24mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a breathtaking sight on your desktop – not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also has a comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz – and so ideal for gaming.

HEADSETS



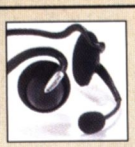
ICEMAT SIBERIA MULTI HEADSET
STREET PRICE €69
MANUFACTURER Soft Trading ApS
TELEPHONE 00 4570 250 075
WEBSITE www.icemat.com

A beguiling combination of modern chic, excellent sound reproduction and the integration of a top-quality microphone propel these headphones to the top of the pile. You can buy a lot cheaper, but if you want to look like an old-school astronaut and play games in absolute comfort, you won't find a better pair without travelling to distant planets far, far away.



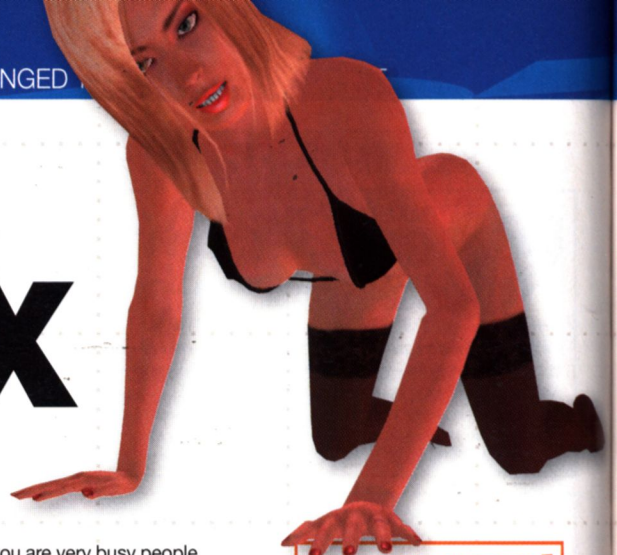
EXTREME PC GAMING HEADSET
WAS £15 NOW £20
STREET PRICE £20
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

This fits all the criteria for a gaming headset: it's comfortable (so you can spend hours shouting at your team-mates without feeling you've been cuffed round the ear), the boom comes with an easy-to-position ratchet and it sports a noise-cancelling microphone with excellent voice reproduction. The cable's a bit short, but that's the only drawback – and at this price, it's a steal.



HS300
STREET PRICE £11
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE europe.creative.com

Light and comfortable and with impressive audio considering the rock-bottom price, the Creative HS300's are well worth considering if you're after a new pair of headphones on a budget. Sound is rounded, with a decent scoop of bass, and while they can't match the Logitech Extreme for voice quality, your message still comes across loud and clear. If you're strapped for cash, consider these.



EMAIL YOUR RANTS TO MAILBOX@PCZONE.CO.UK



MAILBOX

Send us your rants, we'll reply in our pants...

■ **RENT-A-NORTHERNER** Jamie Sefton



Issue 156: it's unreal!

JESUS CHRIST

In your preview of Civilization IV (issue 155), you said: "Why are we picking Christmas trees? Jesus hasn't even been invented yet." Sorry to go all politically correct on you lot, but Jesus was born not invented – someone had to get mildly offended didn't they? Now I can calm down and get on with my life and let you continue making us all such a great mag.

Philip Speake

Well Philip, you'll be happy to know that Steve Hill will now probably burn in hell for eternity because of his flippant comments about our Lord and Saviour. Actually, while we're on the subject of blasphemy, we must also apologise for the comment on page 46 of last month's issue, where we referred to Buddha as a "fat bastard"...

GEEKS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

Why do others call people who know how to use a computer 'geeks'? Where did the word come from? It doesn't seem fair – just because I have a lot of games and generally don't see the sun very often, I'm labelled a geek (although not by everyone, as they don't all know I use a computer). I'd much prefer being called a games enthusiast.

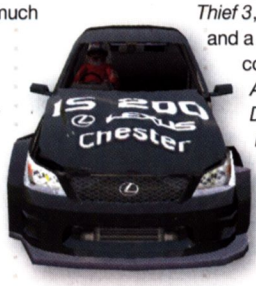
Matt Spencer

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary Of The English Language*, the word actually comes from 19th century travelling circuses, when it was used to describe a costumed performer "who engaged in bizarre acts, such as biting the head off a live chicken".

However, here at *ZONE* we reckon it's time that all games enthusiasts reclaimed the word for ourselves – become 'geek and proud' of our superior knowledge and expertise. And if anyone calls us a nerd, we'll chew their fking head off.**

CHEAPSKATE

I recently went down to my local games shop and managed to pick up the following under a 'buy two get one free' offer: *Thief 3*, *TOCA Race Driver* and a compilation comprising of *Jedi Academy*, *Conflict: Desert Storm 2*, *Beyond Good & Evil* and *Champ Man 4*. As each was £9.99, I managed to get six games for under 20 quid!



If you're prepared to stay one step behind the cutting-edge PC technology, the savings are there to be made. You'll still get to play games on the sort of system they were meant to be played on anyway! One more thing – *Armed & Dangerous* for £2! Bargain!

Phil Robbins

I also used to love buying cheapo stuff – the Virgin White Label range of LucasArts stuff such as *TIE Fighter* and *The Secret Of Monkey Island* was particularly good I seem to remember. You're not from Yorkshire as well are you Phil?

WID DA KIDZ

My name is Matthew, I'm 14 and I absolutely love your magazine. Me and my friends Philip and Lee were wondering, since we like your magazine so much, if maybe we could come and visit you in London and you could show us the process of making the magazine. I do understand you are very busy people though, and don't want a group of kids in the office – but it would be so cool to hang out with you guys.

PS – *PC ZONE* ROCKS!

Matthew Price

Matthew – hey wassup dude! *Does very bad rap pose*. While we'd love to have you and your mates around the place (Will would love a break from making us all tea), I feel that the constant swearing, smoking, drinking and general debauchery would be a bad example for the youth of today.

We do sometimes have work experience places for those aged 16 and above though – contact us in a couple of years when you have the obligatory games journalist handful of C-grade 'O' levels.

CHARACTER FLAWS

All the latest releases seem to miss one thing – characters with emotion and feeling. When I played *Grim Fandango*, I cared about what was going to happen to Manny. I laughed out loud at his antics, his sarcastic comments, his humorous remarks. The people he responded to had depth and feeling – the conversations between Glottis and Manny were sublime. So where are the Guybrush Threepwoods of our day?

Fantastic graphics and physics effects are important, but a great game needs depth, the ability to make you empathise, to make you feel. I want more games that make you laugh, make you cry and give a sense of achievement upon completion.

Adam Bowden

Absolutely. I remember bawling my eyes out when John Mullins first got his head blown off in *Soldier Of Fortune 2*. However, some of the best examples of good characters in recent games, include Alyx, Dog and Eli from *Half-Life 2*, and Raz, Dogan and Lili from *Psychonauts*. Until the majority of developers/publishers realise that characters are vital to an immersive, rewarding game, we'll have to endure clichéd by-the-numbers cut-outs such as *Pariah's* Dr Jack Mason.

NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL MUSIC

I've been quite baffled for some time now as to why there aren't more game soundtracks about. I know there are soundtracks to games such as the *GTA* series and the *Final Fantasy* games – but there have got to be more.

Over the years there have been numerous games that have



BANNED!

In a bid to make these pages even more exciting, we're flexing our dictatorial muscle and exorcising certain dead topics. Write to us about these things and we won't print your letter, and we definitely won't send you a graphics card. You have been warned...

- **More ideas for games/snacks match-ups. Enough!**
- **Desperate blags for graphics cards.**
- **Will there be a *Half-Life 3*?**

SEND US A LETTER AND WIN A TOP-OF-THE-RANGE GRAPHICS CARD

MAILBOX, *PC ZONE*, FUTURE PUBLISHING, 99 BAKER ST, LONDON, W1U 6FP OR MAILBOX@PCZONE.CO.UK

■ **The new GE Force 6600 GT is one of the best graphics cards we've ever reviewed, with extreme overclocking, ludicrously fast memory and ultra cooling. Write us a letter and if we think it's the pick of the month, we'll send you one to stick in your PC. What are you waiting for?**





Rome: Total War has some great music to slay the opposition to.

had brilliant music – like *Rome: Total War* or *Neverwinter Nights* – yet after you've played the game, you never hear them again. Either these soundtracks don't make it to the stores or they're not even made available, and the only way to actually buy many of them is on Ebay.

If it's too costly, then how about just bringing a 'best-of' soundtrack at the end of the year for the games out in that year?

Martin Pidhajeckyj

In Japan, collectable game soundtracks are big business – I recently bought a fantastic *Final Fantasy XI* CD with original artwork and bonus DVD. I think that companies in the West are slowly catching on to the fact there is a market out there for original game soundtracks – the most recent example being the *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* CD by Ninja Tune's Amon Tobin.

The problem for compilations is getting music clearance from publishers, but it's an interesting topic. Maybe we could look into doing a special *PC ZONE Best Of Game Soundtracks* bonus CD in a future mag.

BIG BROTHER

I was intrigued today when I picked up my copy of *PC ZONE* from where it had landed with a meaty thump when the postman stuck it through my door. What was this exciting advert on the 'Future Publishing, try our other magazines' sheet of paper?

Introducing *Junior* and *Junior Pregnancy & Baby*. "How do they know I'm going to be a dad in a few months?" I wondered.



I was confused at first, then it dawned on me – obviously Woods has planted surveillance gear in the house of every subscriber, with which he is now gathering information to run his huge criminal empire, with the aim of taking over the world. Or possibly it was just pure coincidence.

And then I started thinking – what's the best way to indoctrinate young children to ensure that they play PC games and not consoles? Possibly a *ZONE* feature is needed to tell parents how to do it. I fully intend my child to be playing *Counter-Strike* and *Enemy Territory* by the age of four, but what's the best way to make this happen? Oh well, back to the vodka…

Ben Lambert

Good idea Ben. Perhaps you could wallpaper your new baby's room with old copies of *PC ZONE*? Maybe you could wear masks of Steve Hill and Dave Woods for the formative years of the child's life? I think we're onto something here. Oh, and by the way, enjoy your complimentary copy of Future's *So You Want To Buy A Lawnmower?* magazine.

ONLINE ADDICTS

My husband has become welded to his mouse. All I can hear is him chatting to his mates about griffons. He keeps nagging at me to play, but I know that if I start, I'll have no life left – just like him. How long before we see *WOWA – World Of Warcraft* Anonymous? It can only be a matter of time before someone realises the damage this game can do to a person's life and so sets up the first self-help group. (I can see it now: "My name is Al, and I'm a 51st level Dwarf warrior.") In the meantime, at least I can watch a soppy film whenever I want to.

Julia K

In the past I've avoided *EverQuest* in much the same way I avoided hard drugs. Then you go and put a free demo of *EverQuest II* on your DVD. I stopped myself from loading it for a while, but then I got hopelessly stuck on *Vampire: Bloodlines* so I loaded it up. The next day I bought the full version of the game.

I've played nothing else since – heck I've *done* nothing else since. I spend my days at work skiving off looking at *EQII* stuff on the Web, my wife misses me, my dog doesn't get very long walks, I eat food that takes no time to prepare and I go to bed at ridiculous times of night. Even then I dream about beasts with coloured text above their heads. You have ruined my life and I love it!

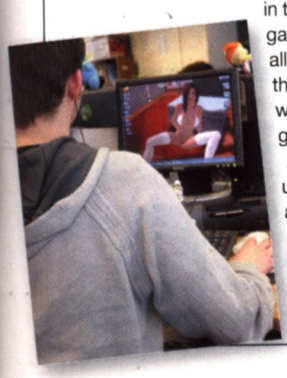
Simon aka Faja

Sounds to me like Julia's hubby and Simon are both the type of people who bite the heads off live chickens.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

PORN AGAIN

Yo *PC ZONE*! Sefton! Woodsie! Hee hee! My eyes popped out of my head as I sat peacefully on the throne reading the new *PC ZONE*! *Virtually Jenna*? It couldn't be, could it? My God, it is! The alluring pictures were better than I expected, and I'm someone who got all excited with the melons in that Xbox volleyball game, so I can imagine all too well the thrill of those curves viewed with a red-hot PC graphics card.



Of course, ultimately I have to agree with your review, it's probably a turd, but it did prompt me to let your readers know of a better 'In Perspective' alternative.

For about £34, you can buy a DVD entitled *Virtual Sex With Jenna*, which is much better and on a similar theme. The graphics really are tip-top, almost lifelike, (although the breasts do look unrealistic and nobody could have a mouth that big). It's true that you don't have access to all the household objects of *Virtually Jenna*, but the default Huge Vibrator is the everyman weapon of choice anyhow. The DVD is extremely replayable, with the same section not getting boring for ages. Although this may be because I've only managed to watch it in short bursts.

James (don't print my second name)

Certainly Mr Brierley. Thanks for your in-depth knowledge of cutting-edge pornography. Have a new graphics card while you can still see.

The question is, where's Will's other hand?

BACKCHAT



A very serious issue was discussed on the forums this month – sweet and savoury snacks and their gaming equivalent. For example, *UT2004* would be pickled onion Monster Munch because they're both big, chunky, flavoursome, loved by many yet not the serious snack-eaters. Here are the musings from the forums at www.pczone.co.uk.

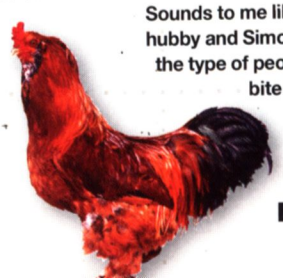
According to rjcanty, *GTA: Vice City* is Asda's Smartprice crisps, 4x Wotsits, 4x salt and vinegar, 4x onion rings: "A nice mix of everything and you can't get enough. Damn additives." Meanwhile, spudy2000 think *Tribes: Vengeance* is just like a Picnic bar. "It's absolutely delicious, you always see it in the shop, but no-one you know eats it." Awaiting a Backchat backlash is deadmartyr, who equates Cadbury's Milk Tray with *The Sims*, "'cause that's all the lady loves".

Moving swiftly on, we have several suggestions by moomoocow8: "*Silent Hunter III* = Kettle Chips. A refined snack for refined people with beards. Oh, and those Gary Lineker crisps = *FIFA 2004*. Adding a new flavour (like marmite) every year does nothing to spice up the range, as it's still the same uninspiring crap."

Davetsutton, however, asserts that: "*Splinter Cell* is a Custard Cream. They're both yellow and have a custard filling." Rrrrright. Petepointon has a more analytical choice: "I think *Civilization* is more like a Terry's Chocolate Orange. You see one every few years, usually dropped in among your Christmas presents, enjoy its geometric regularity and the sheer familiarity of it for a while, then pick away at it until you find it just a little cloying." So true.

Meanwhile, Crow555 decided to go down memory lane: "Does anyone remember Secrets bars? For those that don't, they were a chocolate tube made of chocolate strands and filled with what could be described as chocolate mousse. The confectionary of kings. I'd equate them to *System Shock 2* – a firm favourite but no longer available to buy." The final word goes to speakafreaka: "*Halo* = Polo mint". Normal service will be resumed next month.

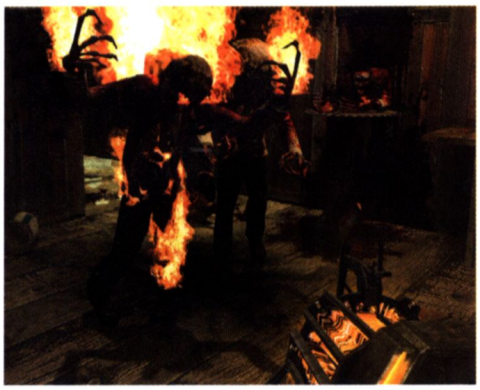




THE PCZONE A-LIST

SHOOTERS

HALF-LIFE 2



We always knew that somewhere within our PC there was the potential for absolute, outright brilliance – and now Valve's cracked it. *Half-Life 2* is a masterpiece, and a game that won't be trumped for a long, long time. Maybe not even until *Half-Life 3*. With physics, design, art and ambience to die for, this sequel builds on its Black Mesa roots with stunning aplomb. Gordon Freeman, we salute you.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Valve

PCZ ISSUE 148



FAR CRY

Far Cry may be several notches beneath *Half-Life 2*, but it remains an outstanding and exhilarating experience that pushes your rig and your nerves to their limits. The narrative may be iffy, but *Far Cry* is a cracking achievement.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Crytek **PCZ ISSUE 140**



DOOM 3

Technologically dazzling, genuinely shock-providing and resolutely back to basics: *Doom 3* may not bring anything new to the FPS table, but it's still a stunning thrill-ride that every PC gamer should sample.

PUB Activision **DEV** id Software **PCZ ISSUE 146**



CALL OF DUTY

With an excellent expansion in the form of *United Offensive*, *Call Of Duty* remains the best war game on the PC – and possibly of all time. Constantly managing to mix up feelings of dread and excitement, it's an absolute must-play.

PUB Activision **DEV** Infinity Ward **PCZ ISSUE 136**



MAX PAYNE 2

It's Payne! Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense and well-designed that you just won't care.

PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Remedy **PCZ ISSUE 136**



TRIBES: VENGEANCE

A generation-leaping storyline and some silky skiing and sliding slot this remoulding of the online favourite firmly into these hallowed pages. It's a brilliant and original game, even if a few levels are slightly lacklustre.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Irrational Games **PCZ ISSUE 147**



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and it's genuinely funny. What's more, it doesn't treat you like an idiot.

PUB Black Label Games **DEV** VU Games **PCZ ISSUE 122**



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Long in the tooth? Dated? Not one iota. The original *Half-Life* remains a touchstone for every shooter of recent years, and for good reason: it's fantastic, and remains so to this day. Play it again – the magic's still there.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Valve Software **PCZ ISSUE 71**



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

It may be a multiplayer game, but the superb bots of *UT2004* still grab it a place in the *PC ZONE* solo-shooter hall of fame. It's quite simply the greatest deathmatch experience money can buy.

PUB Atari **DEV** Digital Extremes **PCZ ISSUE 138**



SWAT 4

Ever wanted to kick down a door, bellow "DOWN ON THE GROUND!" and spray pepper into an old lady's face? Well now you can! Fantastic level design and varied gameplay make *SWAT 4* a winner.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Irrational Games **PCZ ISSUE 154**

STRATEGY

ROME: TOTAL WAR



An engine that makes grown men cry, AI so great that Hannibal could be in charge and a cinematic tinge that grabs your social life and will not let go. *Rome: Total War* is every inch the champion we knew it would be. A few rough edges appear occasionally, but this is strategy far above anything we've seen in *Medieval: Total War* or anywhere else. The greatest battle simulator ever.

PUB Activision

DEV The Creative Assembly

PCZ ISSUE 148



LORD OF THE RINGS: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

Melding the best of the hardcore and mainstream markets, this strategic gem combines intuitive gameplay with real-life tactics to create an epic, deeply entertaining experience that's dripping with atmosphere.

PUB EA **DEV** EA Pacific **PCZ ISSUE 149**



RISE OF NATIONS

One of the most addictive and satisfying strategy games to land on our desks in ages. Its unique perspective, great gameplay and, now, its excellent expansion *Thrones And Patriots* make it hugely deserving of our prestigious Classic award.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Big Huge Games **PCZ ISSUE 129**



SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics and warfare. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumbling of distant tanks never so worrying.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Best Way **PCZ ISSUE 144**



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere. In addition, it boasts a decent map editor.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Ensemble Studios **PCZ ISSUE 123**



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

If you're looking for something that doesn't quite fit into the usual template, *Pirates!* is the game for you. With governor's daughters to dally with, trade routes to plunder and land to be lubbered, *Pirates!* is a winner.

PUB Atari **DEV** Firaxis **PCZ ISSUE 149**



GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS

Despite a few AI glitches and dull objectives, *GCII* is a great game if you prefer tactics to boring old resource management. A superb sci-fi effort with some intense freeform missions, strat-fans should check it out.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Massive Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 143**



WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR

An old school charmer with some cool visuals, varied units and super-flash presentation: what *Dawn Of War* loses in dull AI it wins through with sheer orcish belligerence. Multiplayer is pretty smart too.

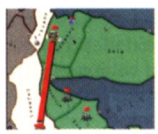
PUB THQ **DEV** Relic **PCZ ISSUE 147**



EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

The latest to fall off the *Age Of Empires* lorry may not innovate, but there's a good variety of nations with accurate historical spins (General Patton, Richard the Lionheart etc), as well as novel unit types and well-written campaigns.

PUB Activision **DEV** Stainless Steel Studios **PCZ ISSUE 135**



HEARTS OF IRON II

A supremely hardcore RTS with the trappings of *Risk*, this certainly isn't for the uninitiated or foolhardy. Functional graphics hide a deep, complex system of world conflict and politics – if you're clever enough that is.

PUB JoWood **DEV** Paradox **PCZ ISSUE 152**

Want to know what's the best shooter, what's the top strategy game or what to play if you want to blow away your mates online? You've come to the right place – the *PC ZONE* A-list. New additions this month include the sparkly and surreal *Psychonauts*, plus fantabulous online game *Guild Wars*. Get playing...

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC



The best RPG to appear for five whole years, and the best *Star Wars* game to surface in ten. *Knights Of The Old Republic* manages to develop the franchise more than even Lucas's cinematic efforts ever could. With beautiful graphics, a gripping plot, oodles of Force powers and supreme character development, this is proof, if ever it were needed, that BioWare is one of the best development houses on the planet.

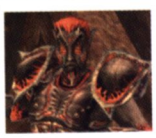
PUB Activision **DEV** BioWare **PCZ ISSUE 137**



DEUS EX

Great sci-fi plot, amazing attention to detail and unparalleled player freedom: combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming.

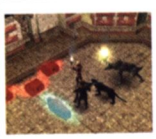
PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm **PCZ ISSUE 93**



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Bethesda Softworks **PCZ ISSUE 117**



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The maker of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series proves it's still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Atari **DEV** BioWare **PCZ ISSUE 118**



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorcher of an RPG.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Black Isle Studio **PCZ ISSUE 87**



VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES

Once you get past the bugs and glitches, *Bloodlines* is a deep, absorbing game that everyone with an interest in the genre should play. Great dialogue, clever plot and (despite the dodgy combat), a superb experience.

PUB Activision **DEV** Troika Games **PCZ ISSUE 150**



DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic award because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Gas Powered Games **PCZ ISSUE 115**



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA **DEV** Irrational Games **PCZ ISSUE 80**



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. If PC role-playing's your thang, this is essential.

PUB Interplay **DEV** BioWare **PCZ ISSUE 96**



DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

It's had most of its role-playing elements sucked out and developed a strong console bias, but the gripping plot and action remain intact. It wasn't the revolution we wanted, but it's still a worthwhile purchase.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm **PCZ ISSUE 137**

ACTION/ADVENTURE

SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY



An amazing new rendition of Sam Fisher's oeuvre, now packaged not only with the excellent gruff mercs vs slinky spies multiplayer but also with a (strangely homoerotic) co-op mode where two players can join forces for some stealth rough 'n' tumble. The single-player remains brilliant as well, with Sam's moves and new-found knifework becoming so lithe and smooth he's apparently aging backwards. Great stuff.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft Montreal **PCZ ISSUE 154**



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

A beautiful game with a myriad of styles that evokes the spirit of *Little Big Adventure*, along with a touch of *Zelda* sparkle. Whether you're fighting government conspiracies or photographing wildlife, it's never dull.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft **PCZ ISSUE 138**



PSYCHONAUTS

NEW ENTRY Mind-bending level design, joy-inducing art direction, funny, smart characters and sparkling dialogue come slickly together to make one of this year's most original titles. The industry needs more games like this. Please.

PUB Majesco **DEV** DoubleFine **PCZ ISSUE 156**



THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

Garrett's new adventure is sure to thrill, although you can't help but feel that it's been hampered by console considerations. That said, sublime level design, amazing sound and real scares make it an excellent buy.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm **PCZ ISSUE 144**



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

He may have gone all moody on us in *Warrior Within*, but we still prefer the Prince's younger, more innocent days of *Sands Of Time*. Combat is iffy, granted, but there's a rare charm here that the sequel could not replicate.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft Montreal **PCZ ISSUE 136**



SPLINTER CELL

Three green lights on his head and (still) some of the best stealth missions available – not bettered by *Pandora Tomorrow* and only recently equalled by *Chaos Theory* – the original *Splinter Cell* is now so cheap it hurts.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft Montreal **PCZ ISSUE 125**



GRIM FANDANGO

If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.

PUB Activision **DEV** LucasArts **PCZ ISSUE 71**



THE SUFFERING

A survival horror that's refreshingly fast and fluid, *The Suffering* takes place in an Alcatraz-style prison and surprised us with its ingenuity and tension-fused set-pieces. It gets slightly repetitive, but it's worth a ride.

PUB Midway **DEV** Surreal Software **PCZ ISSUE 145**



METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

A convincing PC conversion that adds tanker-loads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakfest.

PUB Konami **DEV** Konami **PCZ ISSUE 127**



LEGO STAR WARS

Relive the *Star Wars* prequels with the help of Danish model bricks. It's a barmy concept that works brilliantly – until you realise you've whizzed through its entirety in a matter of hours.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Traveller's Tales **PCZ ISSUE 155**

GOD GAMES

BLACK & WHITE



Although it had its critics, we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and enables you to guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Pure genius in a box.

PUB EA **DEV** Lionhead Studios **PCZ ISSUE 100**



CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard *Civ* fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke…'

PUB Atari **DEV** Firaxis Games **PCZ ISSUE 111**



EVIL GENIUS

It's always more fun being the bad guy, and when you're an insane megalomaniac it's even better. *Evil Genius* awakens the Blofeld inside you, with all the henchmen, lairs and diabolical plans you could ask for. Basic graphics, ace gameplay.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Elixir **PCZ ISSUE 147**



THE SIMS 2

We still hate *The Sims*, we hate them and everything they stand for, but even we have to admit that the sequel's a good game in itself. We found it addictive and absorbing when we reviewed it – but we'll have changed our tune by the time the fifth expansion pack is dribbled onto the market.

PUB EA **DEV** Maxis **PCZ ISSUE 147**



STRONGHOLD 2

Packed with humour, depth, detail and replayability, this filth-ridden castle-constructing sim brings to mind the classic Bullfrog games of yore. Few games combine economy-building and battlefield action with such seamless panache.

PUB: 2K Games **DEV:** Firefly **PCZ ISSUE 155**



VEGA$: MAKE IT BIG

An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself, *Make It Big* provides hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that let you suck the money out of punters' pockets. It can get a little too fiddly, but it looks and plays really well. A *PC ZONE* 'Essential'.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Deep Red **PCZ ISSUE 135**



SPACE COLONY

Whether you're trying to attract space-tourists or battle neighbouring aliens, taking control of 20 rowdy space colonists and pandering to them makes for a charming and original management jaunt, with plenty of missions to keep you busy for a fair while.

PUB Gathering **DEV** Firefly Studios **PCZ ISSUE 136**



ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3

A stirling return for the ride-creating cash-cow that brings with it a snazzy 3D engine and more coasters than you can shake a stick at. It doesn't quite recall the *Theme Park* glory days, but *Rollercoaster Tycoon 3* is the closest we've been in ages.

PUB Atari **DEV** Frontier Developments **PCZ ISSUE 149**



EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historic campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Breakaway Games **PCZ ISSUE 121**



SIM CITY 4

The latest outing of the best-selling city-building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately, there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features, such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.

PUB EA **DEV** Maxis **PCZ ISSUE 125**

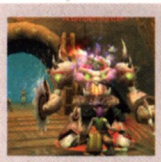
MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

EVERQUEST II



The best just got soooo much better. As visually alluring as a lingerie-clad supermodel holding a giant meat pie, as full of content as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and as addictive as purple Fruit Pastilles topped with Pringles. Sony has learnt every lesson it could in the five years since the original and produced a MMOG that sets new standards across the board.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 150**



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

The most popular PC game of all time according to reports, *World Of Warcraft* is the 'other' best MMOG ever. Less realistic and perhaps a touch more fun than *EQII*, it's horses for courses as to which one you choose. The only real difference is that *WOW* is PvP based.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Blizzard **PCZ ISSUE 152**



GUILD WARS

NEW ENTRY Instantly playable, insanely addictive, no monthly fees – what more could you want from an online game? Not strictly an MMO, but near enough that it makes no difference. Action-based, with an emphasis on skills not levels, this is superb stuff.

PUB NCsoft **DEV** NCsoft **PCZ ISSUE 156**



CITY OF HEROES

It may not have scored as high as the others in our review, but this spandex-wearing, justice-dispensing, superhero-themed MMOG has certainly won over the popular vote. Long-term appeal may be dubious, but for instant-action fun, it simply can't be beaten.

PUB NCsoft **DEV** Cryptic Studios **PCZ ISSUE 149**



PLANETSIDE

The eternal war for Auraxis just keeps on going, but now with giant battlemechs thrown into the mix. The subterranean *Core Combat* expansion may have disappeared down its own hole, but recent updates have managed to keep the fighting fresh.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 131**



EVE ONLINE

Best described as '*Elite Online*', the sedate nature of *EVE* has managed to pull in more and more space traders with each passing month. It may not be the most human of MMOGs, but it's definitely worth putting the time into it considering what you get back.

PUB CCP **DEV** CCP **PCZ ISSUE 130**



ANARCHY ONLINE

Quirky science-fiction action abounds in this ever-popular take on mankind's distant future. Two major expansions (one practically bigger than the original game) and a forthcoming graphical overhaul is doing more than enough to keep the world of Rubi-ka buzzing.

PUB Funcom **DEV** Funcom **PCZ ISSUE 148**



FINAL FANTASY XI ONLINE

Probably the best of the non-*EverQuest* fantasy MMOGs (although not by much), this Japanese entry into the genre is about as fully realised a world as you can get. The controls may be cumbersome, but you can't deny the atmosphere that lies within.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Square Enix **PCZ ISSUE 148**



DARK AGE OF CAMELOT

The fantasy version of *PlanetSide* (although without the FPS-trappings) is still going strong, despite firm opposition. It's starting to show its age now, although a graphical overhaul due in a few months time might be enough to keep it competitive.

PUB Mythic Entertainment **DEV** Mythic Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 149**



EVERQUEST

The original can't compare to its sequel in terms of looks and polished gameplay, but five years of expansions have kept its half a million regular players more than happy. There's more on the way too, just in case you feel like keeping it old school.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 149**

ONLINE SHOOTERS

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004



A fleshed out, revamped *UT* offering that far exceeds both its predecessors and our expectations. Extra game modes, superb vehicles plus inspired weapons and features make this one of the best multiplayer blasts around. The new Onslaught mode has given a new dimension to the series, adding tactical awareness to the list of skills online shootists need to master. It even plays well offline, making *UT2004* the definitive choice.

PUB Atari **DEV** Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE 138



BATTLEFIELD 1942

Not much in single-player, but online this Swedish gem has redefined the way online shooters work. Infantry, jeeps, tanks, planes, bombers, ships – the total WWII experience, minus the searing horror and psychological scarring for life.

PUB EA **DEV** Digital Illusions **PCZ ISSUE 121**



JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING

150 players! Count 'em. Some say a world record (although *PlanetSide* begs to disagree), this is modern-day online warfare at its finest. Quality maps, plenty of vehicles and the best helicopters in the business – why, it even has useful mortars.

PUB NovaLogic **DEV** NovaLogic **PCZ ISSUE 145**



BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

Take *BF1942*, drop it into the '60s and bingo – the total Vietnam war experience. More claustrophobic than *BF1942*, which suits the jungle warfare period setting, this has a great '60s mood: all it needs is the late Brando and it'd be perfect.

PUB EA **DEV** DICE Canada **PCZ ISSUE 141**



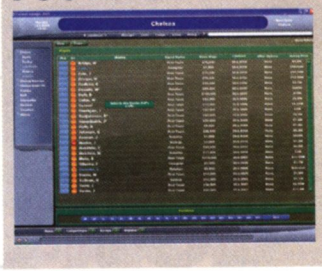
COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

The daddy of all online shooters is back, running on the jaw-dropping *Half-Life 2* engine. All your favourites are here – Dust, Italy, Office – all with realistic physics. All that's missing is *HL2*'s ability to pick up objects, but it's surely only a mod away.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Valve **NOT REVIEWED**

SPORT

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005



Eidos and the *Champ Man* licence have got a hell of a lot to beat in Sports Interactive's *Football Manager* – easily the most streamlined and absorbing management game to come out of its stable to date. It's management in its purest form, with an improved match engine working under the bonnet of a sparkling (well, green and gray) redesigned interface. We're just as addicted as we always were.

PUB Sega **DEV** Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 149



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

Fact. This is the finest arcade football gamer ever. Incomparably better than any *FIFA* offering, *PES* is the only footie game that plays like the real thing – with all the joys and agonies that entails.

PUB Konami **DEV** Konami **PCZ ISSUE 149**



VIRTUA TENNIS

Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Hitmaker/Strangelite **PCZ ISSUE 114**



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005

Some new game modes gives 2005's Tiger 'em up some welcome variety – although even without them, it would remain the PC's premier golf sim. This year is a good vintage too, with visuals to die for.

PUB EA Sports **DEV** EA Sports **PCZ ISSUE 148**



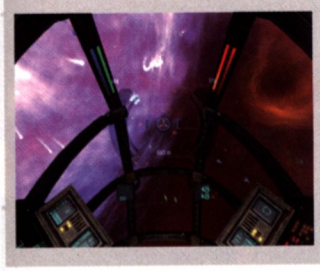
NHL 2005

Shiny and beautiful, yet nowhere near as vapid as its *FIFA* compatriot, EA's *NHL* series continues its run of consistent excellence. Better AI, better production and as slick as they come.

PUB EA Sports **DEV** EA Sports **PCZ ISSUE 148**

SPACE COMBAT

X2: THE THREAT



Vast, engrossing and utterly compelling. We firmly believe that *X2* is the game that can finally banish the memory of *Elite* to the shadows. The level of detail here is immense, as is the potential. Build your own space empire, form a pirate fleet or just bomb around the universe like an interstellar playboy. The game could go on forever. And did we mention it's also gobsmackingly beautiful? OK, the story isn't all that, but while nothing's perfect in life, *X2* comes very close.

PUB Deep Silver **DEV** Egosoft **PCZ ISSUE 138**



FREELANCER

Freelancer combines the epic open-endedness of *Elite* with the combat immediacy of the *Wing Commander* series. It also mixes in a well played out (if short) story and gorgeous graphics to create a totally engaging experience.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Digital Anvil **PCZ ISSUE 128**



X – GOLD

The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this huge trading epic, in which you must buy and fight your way back home to Earth. It rewards patience with variety and months of absorbing gameplay. Deeply hypnotic and beautiful rather than tense and frenetic.

PUB THQ **DEV** Egosoft **PCZ ISSUE 82**



TERMINUS

Who says the days of bedroom programming are over? *Terminus* proves you can make a great game on your own if you have the talent and passion – we reckon it just edges out the mighty *FreeSpace 2*.

PUB www.macgames.co.uk **DEV** Vicarious Visions **PCZ ISSUE 93**



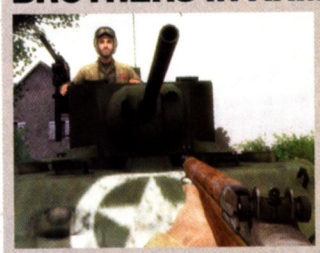
FREESPACE 2

Following in the footsteps of *Wing Commander* and *X-Wing*, *FreeSpace 2* offers fast-paced dogfighting action all the way. It has an epic story and superb graphics, but does suffer from being a bit short-lived if you don't play online.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Volition Inc **PCZ ISSUE 84**

3D ACTION/STRATEGY

BROTHERS IN ARMS



Clever and intuitive tactics (once you get into the meat of it) meld with the WWII first-person scenario you know and love. More realistic than the bombastic Hollywood fare in *Call Of Duty*, *Brothers In Arms* is an admirably gritty and highly replayable jaunt, flanking Nazis through the woods, fields and foxholes of wartime Normandy. Essentially the place where *Medal Of Honor* and *Full Spectrum Warrior* collide, it comes highly recommended.

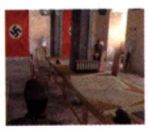
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Gearbox **PCZ ISSUE 153**



OPERATION FLASHPOINT

The Game of the Year edition of *Flashpoint* remains widely available, and remains as wonderfully immersive as ever. With the *Resistance* expansion alongside the original missions, if you love tactical warfare, you'll love this.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Bohemia Interactive **PCZ ISSUE 104**



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

With a real Boy's Own-feel, a ninja-bastard difficulty rating and the same superb engine as *Mafia*, *H&D 2* is one of the finest squad-based tactical shooters around. It's got a few bugs, but it's still an essential purchase.

PUB Gathering **DEV** Illusion Softworks **PCZ ISSUE 136**



FREEDOM FORCE VS THE 3RD REICH

Smack! and, indeed, kerblammo! as our favourite heroes travel through time to fight the Nazis. Much comic silliness, knock-about combat and ironic guffawing make the second *FF* game a blast. If you like that kind of thing.

PUB Digital Jesters **DEV** Irrational Games **PCZ ISSUE 154**



FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

A remarkably innovative military simulator, *FSW* provides tense urban combat with you in a commanding role – despite feeling as if you're in the line of fire with your two fire-teams. It gets repetitive, but it's worth a look.

PUB THQ **DEV** Pandemic Studios **PCZ ISSUE 147**

DISC PAGES

DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The *PC ZONE* DVD is now double-sided, which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the *PC ZONE* disc browser and turn the disc over.

E3 FALLOUT



DISCWORLD

WORDS & DISCS Suzy Wallace

Welcome to ground zero. Oh yes, it's that time of year again. E3, the gaming world's equivalent of the H-bomb has been dropped, the dust has settled and we've all been left standing around trying to deal with the fallout.

The show offered the usual host of scantily clad women to tempt the passer-by, the opportunity for Ant to join the ranks of the *ZONE* writers who've taken a lash on Hugh Hefner's lawn, and a plethora of PC titles that have got us more than a little hot under the collar. But spare a thought for your poor disc editor back home, as with the gaming world's centre of attention currently focused on a gigantic exhibition hall on practically the other side of the world, the supply of disc-worthy content turned to a mere trickle. You see, our industry practically grinds to a halt for the few days it takes to amaze the gathered assortment of PR peeps, journos and general gaming fans.

When I was finally able to tear my own eyes away from the beautiful images filling my monitor, I suddenly had a vision. I must become the E3 messiah, spreading the word to the ordinary gamer stuck in Blighty. And so I've managed to round up an impressive 63 movies for you to cast your eager eye over, so many in fact that they take up an entire side of the DVD. And once you've finished ogling that little lot, you can join the ranks of the crazy space-kids in *Phantasy Star Online Blue Burst*, take an Alfa Romeo out for a spin in *SCAR* and more. Enjoy!

THE BIGGEST AND BEST GAMES OF E3

MAKE SURE you grab a comfy seat and some popcorn, because you'll want to be sitting comfortably for this massive collection of movies that we've managed to amass for your good selves. Because there's so many of the little buggers, if you're struggling to know where to start, take a good hard look at these two pages – we've hand-picked the best for you right here. And once you've watched them all, don't forget that you can still see any movies that missed out on our strict disc deadlines at www.computerandvideogames.com/events/e3_2005. Enjoy!

MOVIES

PC ZONE

OUR FEATURE PRESENTATION...

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

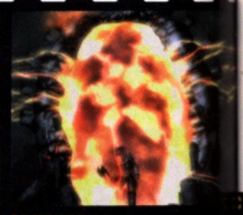
CD1/DVD Lush visuals, a vast expansive world and the voice of Jean-Luc Picard, *Oblivion* is the hottest prospect on the map for all RPG-ers everywhere and will give even the pastiest of losers the urge to go on long forest walks.



QUAINT towns full of peasants going about their business



A DEER hears something mysterious happening...



CRIMINY! It's only some sort of gateway to evil!

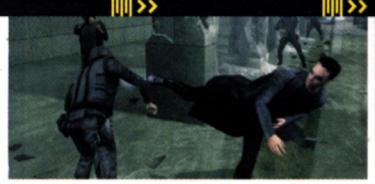
ALSO SHOWING...



FEAR (CD1/DVD)
Ooh, this one's a doozy – a FPS set to steal the laurels from Freeman's crowbar. Scary little girls, slo-mo gore and a Hollywood voice-over oozing with adrenaline. Just... So... Excited...



DARK SECTOR (CD1/DVD)
Digital Extremes has packed in some heavy love on *Dark Sector* – a game starring a kind of futuristic Sam Fisher and some natty-looking gadgets and stealth gymnastics.



THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO (DVD ONLY)
Legend tells of a ring... "No that's not right. What was that other film franchise we liked?" Erm... *Carry On* films? "Yeah, I did used to like them." Must be that then. "Hyak Hyak Hyak."



STALKER: SHADOWS OF CHERNOBYL (CD1/DVD)
So delayed it's covered in radioactive Ukrainian permafrost, but still a mind-meltingly exciting prospect. Crack open the potato vodka.



CALL OF DUTY 2 (DVD ONLY)
Can Infinity Ward recapture the magic of *Call Of Duty* and blend it with the epoch-making *Allied Assault*? Everything here points to 'yes' – we just hope they've chosen a different beach.



TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND (DVD ONLY)
So can Lara steal her throne back from the Prince of Persia? Who knows? The franchise's holes are said to be in the process of being plugged, but it's still a matter of wait and see.



APB (DVD ONLY)
All a bit pre-rendered this one, but the idea of a massively multiplayer *Grand Theft Auto* (from the guy who actually invented *GTA* itself) is more than a little bit mouth-watering.



HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY (DVD ONLY)
This is a bloody good trailer, so maybe Io Interactive will really nail it this time. There's always been such potential in *Hitman*, but it's never quite hit the target. Fingers crossed.



RISE OF NATIONS: ROL (CD1/DVD)
Bizarre departure into science fiction for the Microsoft strategy franchise. Still, guns, dragons and robots combine for a movie that puts a definite kink in your eyebrow.

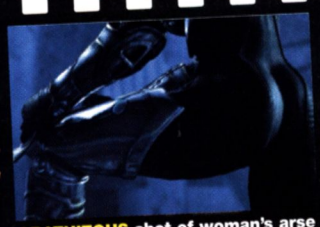
OUR FEATURE PRESENTATION...

HELLGATE: LONDON

DVD ONLY The very bowels of hell are due to open in the London of the future. Flagship Studios should visit Canary Wharf to flesh out the details.



MASSIVE skull dog suffers daily commute on London Transport



GRATUITOUS shot of woman's arse encourages arousal



RED HOT entity that looks like a Balrog demonstrates arousal



MONEY SHOT of London burning. Fetch the engines

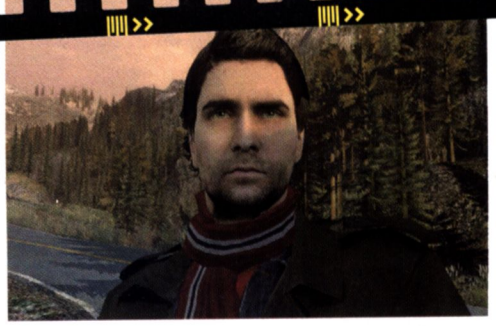
ALSO SHOWING...



THE SUFFERING: TIES THAT BIND (DVD ONLY)
On day release from hell/prison in sunny Baltimore, Torque finds himself surrounded by the forces of evil. Chaos ensues. Torque turns into large monster, creatures pluck syringes out of their eyes and throw them at him. Torque's dead wife looks on and shakes her head. Charming.



COMPANY OF HEROES (CD1/DVD)
Lots of flying rubble, flying bodies and swirling music on display in Relic's intriguing WWII action RTS. Easily one of the best games on show at E3, the physics-infused gameplay and lovingly crafted animation is nothing short of gob-smacking. We like it lots.



ALAN WAKE (CD1/DVD)
If you sit on hills thinking that flowers are nice, then you may well realise that many of the words contained within this teaser are those of none other than William Blake, acclaimed romantic poet and slightly odd chap who thought angels lived in a tree at the bottom of the garden. True story.

OUR FEATURE PRESENTATION...

PRINCE OF PERSIA 3

DVD ONLY Babylon's been invaded and his true love's jumped off a cliff. *POP* games have covered the most traumatic adolescence we've ever seen.



FAT-HANDED monster tries to shoot holes in some Garibaldi biscuits



SEXY LADY looks into the distance and dreams of chocolate digestives



CHAINED Prince is denied his daily supply of Rich Tea. He gets angry



REDEEMED Prince post-sugar fix kicks ass

ALSO SHOWING...



GHOST RECON 3 (CD1/DVD)
It would be good if these games actually had ghosts in, don't you think? And you were, like, doing reconnaissance on haunted houses and stuff. Wouldn't it? Obviously a highly realistic, next-gen combat sim set in Mexico City will have to do until Clancy wakes up and smells the coffee.



CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS (DVD ONLY)
Looking for all the world like an updated version of *Kingpin*, *Condemned* may be coming to Xbox 360 first but is still worth keeping tabs on. Monolith rarely drops the ball and, let's face it, if the *Daily Mail* have picked up on it this early then it must have something going for it.



BATTLEFIELD 2 (DVD ONLY)
Seeing as you're more than two thirds of the way through the mag, you've probably realised that we like *Battlefield 2* quite a lot. If it were a woman then it would probably be the sexy space minx out of *Serenity*, or maybe the pouty violent one out of Girls Aloud. Either way, she'd be pretty.

IMPORTANT!

You can find all of the content here on the DVD, but we can't cram everything onto the two CDs. This is because we can get more than six times the content on our double-sided DVD, including a library of patches and utilities, along with DVD-video (that you can watch on your TV), bigger movies and more playable demos. Demos and movies are getting bigger all the time, and certain games are going to be released on DVD-only. If you still haven't upgraded to DVD, do it now. You can pick up a cheap drive for about £20, so there's no excuse. You could even buy one from Argos, use it for 27 days, then take it back. Not that we advocate doing that, of course.

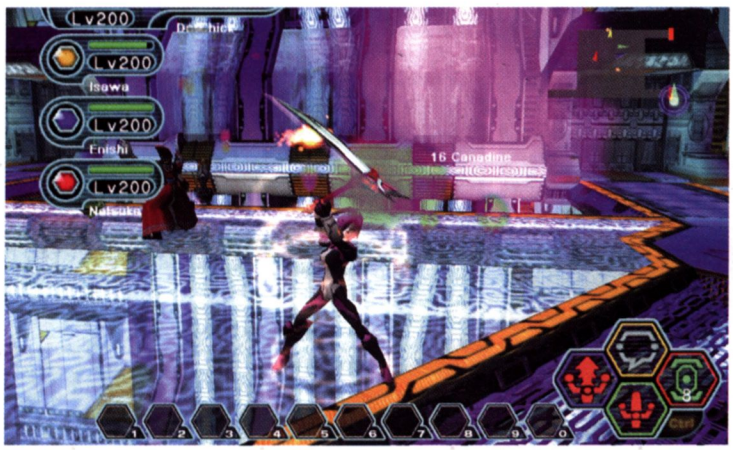
- **ALSO ON THE CD** *Black & White 2, Call Of Cthulhu: Destiny's End, Huxley, Just Cause, Rise & Fall: Civilizations At War*
- **ALSO ON THE DVD** *Need For Speed: Most Wanted, Gothic III, Codename: Panzers – Phase Two, Fahrenheit, City Of The Dead, The Witcher, Dungeon Siege 2, Commandos: Strike Force, Bet On Soldier, Advent Rising, Auto Assault, Star Wars: Battlefront II, Rollercoaster Tycoon 3: Soaked!, GT Legends, Ultimate Spider-Man* and more...

DEMOS

PHANTASY STAR ONLINE BLUE BURST

CD2/DVD Pub: Sega **Dev:** Sonic Team World **Rev:** Issue 157, 81%

IF YOU'VE never experienced the joy of twatting someone over the head with a wok, then you need to try *Blue Burst* now! Featuring all three previous *PSO* adventures along with the new *PSO4*, this futuristic RPG offers tons of quests, customisable characters, zany weapons and the chance to join the console owners who've been engrossed for years!





SCAR: SQUADRA CORSE ALFA ROMEO

DVD ONLY Pub: Lago **Dev:** Milestone World **Rev:** Issue 157, 72%

FERRARI may have nabbed the enviable 'Italian Stallion' nickname but Alfa Romeo's managed to get its own game, so if you fancy trying your hand at the wheel of one of Italy's most prestigious driving manufacturers, then this demo could be just the trick. Three cars direct from the Alfa Romeo garage are available for a spin round the Valenciana track.

● **ALSO ON THE DVD** *Delta Force: Xtreme*, *NHL: Eastside Hockey Manager 2005*, and demos of this month's Indie Zone and Freeplay games

EXTENDED PLAY

64-BIT FAR CRY PACK

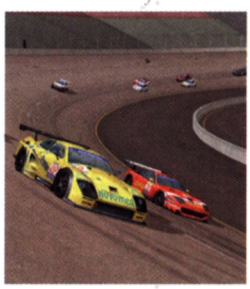


Trouble in paradise.

IF YOU'RE one of the lucky buggers who've splashed your cash on a 64-bit processor, you may have been wondering when you'll start to reap the gaming benefits. Sure, your frame-rate's through the roof, but now processor giant AMD and Crytek have teamed up to treat you to a 64-bit patch and exclusive content upgrade. First up, the patch utilises the hefty processing power available to increase draw distances, improve textures and generally make the game into even more of a looker than it already is. Once you've installed that, the content pack offers you the chance to get your sand-covered mitts on some new areas in the game plus the chance to rain merry hill down upon the beaches of two new multiplayer maps. Just don't forget to send us 32-bitters a postcard!

'KING OF OVALS' EXPANSION PACK FOR GTR

IF YOU happen to be American, your thinking when it comes to car racing may well be along the lines of "Right-handed corners? What the hell do I need those darned things for?" If that's the case, this free *GTR* add-on from Simbin should serve to keep those pesky corners at bay, offering up three US-style oval tracks so adored in the land of the Stetson.



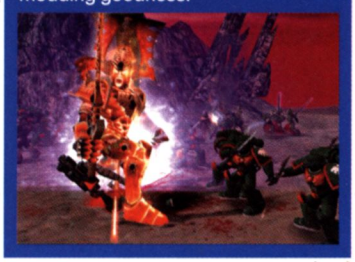
GARRY'S MOD VERSION EIGHT V2

FIDDLING with physics is normally the past-time of eccentric scientists, but *Garry's Mod* has managed to tame the equation-laden science into a friendly form that provides hours of amusement through *Half-Life 2*. This latest version adds a wheel gun, a screen colour shader and spawns you with all weapons in SP games amongst other updates.



WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR TOOLKIT

WITH a patch that increases mod support (v1.30 on the disc) and this toolkit, it looks like Relic is doing all it can to help the mod community keep *Dawn Of War* alive and kicking until the *Winter Assault* expansion rolls into town. So whether it's adding another race to the fray (genestealers anyone?) or tweaking your Blood Ravens' armour, this set of tools provides everything you need in one neat little package of modding goodness.



BUG-FIX OF THE MONTH

Bizarre Problems Fixed In A Patch

THIS MONTH: SILENT HUNTER III

Patch v1.3 informs us "Now Liverpool and Firth of Clyde are in the correct position." Which begs the question, where the hell where they hiding them before?

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MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

- To run the software on these discs, you need at least a PIII 1GHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 3 64MB graphics card and 256MB RAM (512MB recommended for Windows XP users).

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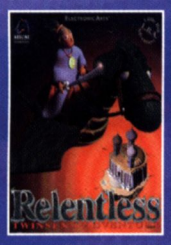


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GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD



LITTLE BIG ADVENTURE

Richie Shoemaker **tells the story of the best game to have ever had a starring cast of elephants, bunnies and fascist dictators. And the only one, come to think of it...**



GAME Little Big Adventure
DEVELOPER Adeline
PUBLISHER EA
RELEASED 1994
INFLUENCED In fusing a storyline full of diverse characters with all the elements of the classic action-adventure platformer, *LBA* was every inch the modern adventure, surely paving the way for the likes of *Tomb Raider* and the slew of wannabes that have followed ever since. Direct influences are hard to pin down however, certainly on PC, as the vogue for grisly realism that *LBA*'s creators tried so hard to buck continues unabated.

PROFILE

Along with Yaël Barroz and Laurent Salmeron (both survivors of *Alone In The Dark*), Frederick Raynal and Didier Chanfray set up Adeline Software with a view to continuing their work creating classic adventures. Prior to *AITD*, Chanfray had a hand in the creation of *Hostage* (1988) – a precursor to the likes of *Rainbow Six*, as well as *ZONE* office favourite *North & South* (1990). Raynal himself has worked on *Fade To Black*, the classic sequel to *Flashback*. These guys have form.



NAME: Frederick Raynal
ROLE ON LBA: Creative director, main programmer and tools programmer
FIRST GAME WORKED ON: *Popcorn* (an old CGA-graphics *Arkanoid* clone). *Alone In The Dark* was his first biggie.
WHERE IS HE NOW: Finishing a stint as a creative advisor, before getting back into development proper.



NAME: Didier Chanfray
ROLE ON LBA: Art director and designer
FIRST GAME WORKED ON: *Side Walk* for Infogrames, a Spectrum game in which a pissed bloke has to buy a Band Aid ticket. Strange but true.
WHERE IS HE NOW: Creative Director of Little World Studio, a company that develops interactive DVD games.

RABIBUNNIES, Grobos, clones of Rabibunnies and clones of Grobos – to the uninitiated, the world of Twinsun is a baffling place. Lorded over by the dictatorship of Funfrock and with the strange wispy goddess known as Sendall apparently otherwise engaged, *Little Big Adventure*'s odd, elliptical jaunts were once the height of Euro-gaming.

Y'see, there was a time in the late '80s and early '90s when the French gaming industry produced titles of quality and sophistication. Believe it or not, while LucasArts was busy revolutionising the adventure genre with *Indiana Jones* and *Maniac Mansion*, it fell to French studios like Delphine to refine the point-and-click format, creating games that were in turn intelligent and absorbing – games like *Future Wars*, *Cruise For A Corpse* and *Operation Stealth*, each of which remain among the very best examples in the woefully thin thriller genre. Then as LucasArts settled into a run of comedy classics, French games like *Captain Blood*, *B.A.T.*, and *Alone In The Dark* would push the adventure game into new, darker territory, paving the way for the likes of *Tomb Raider* and *Resident Evil*.

But, as is so typical of the French (and the English for that matter), rather than capitalising on his new found success, Frederick Raynal – the creator of *Alone In The Dark* – wanted to innovate rather than iterate and, against a run of unending clones that games such as *Doom* and *AITD* had opened the floodgates to, he went out to forge a game as far removed from the blood-soaked corridors of the emergent first-person shooter as possible.

"Ever since *Alien 8* and *Knight Lore* on the Spectrum, I had wanted to do an isometric game," he says, "but I wasn't satisfied with eight-directional sprites. So after *Alone In The Dark*, I was ready for a new step in 3D characters that could be integrated in lighted high-res isometric backgrounds. Don't get me wrong, we loved *Doom*, but we wanted to do something completely different. The idea was to make something fresh and colourful using the rounded aspect that 3D Gouraud shading offered, something with poetry, but also a real game with action and a lot of game mechanics. We also wanted a darker story that would attract the older player."

Raynal quickly got his chance. Before work on *Alone In The Dark* was complete, he was aware of the plans publisher Infogrames had for the sequel, and he knew it was something he wanted no part in creating. As soon as he could, Raynal and key members of his team cleared their desks and headed for the exit.

"The head of Delphine Software came to find us in his Rolls Royce, offering carte blanche for Fred and the team," remembers Didier Chanfray, then 3D artist on *AITD*. "The offer came just at the right time, just when we were at rock bottom."

UN PETIT PLAN

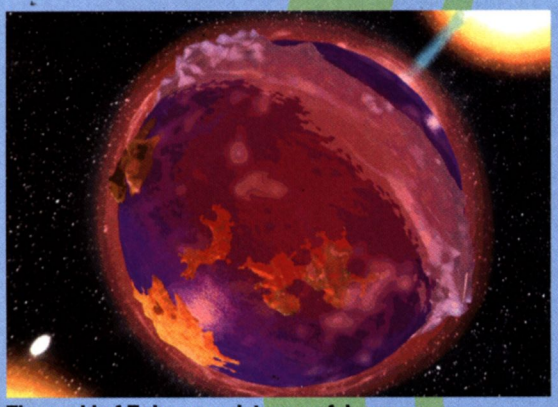
As they waited for computers and paper clips to arrive at their new office, Raynal and the team that comprised the newly formed Adeline Software quickly resurrected the ideas they'd been fostering since before work on *Alone In The Dark* began. Ideas about museum break-ins, Dino-Flies and bunny-rabbit grenade assaults on dictators' palaces started flying around, for a game that it was hoped would give PC owners a taste of *Zelda* – the title that would prove to be *LBA*'s greatest inspiration (as perhaps demonstrated by Twinsen's habit of

"The idea was to make something fresh and colourful using the rounded aspect 3D Gouraud shading offered"
FREDERICK RAYNAL CREATIVE DIRECTOR, *LITTLE BIG ADVENTURE*

playing musical instruments in front of locked doors).

"Always convinced that we should explore and invent new ways of conveying emotion, Fred made us part of the 'little' plan that had been forming in his mind for some time," recalls Chanfray. "He wanted to create a marvellous world where love and peace would be eternal, where kindness and social harmony reigned supreme." And, we might add, a game where pan-pipey music that your mum might listen to would get its first, and only, rapturous welcome to PC gaming.

According to Chanfray, Raynal 'the idealist' had already laid down plans for much of the gameplay before a line of code was written, where a fragile egghead (rather than a muscle-bound hero) would bounce a ball (rather than fire a weapon) in order to dispense of any evil, cloned Twinsunian folk or temple-dwelling skeletons. At the press of a key, he could switch through four modes that would allow Twinsen (the boundlessly energetic hero) to run, sneak or fight his way through a roomful of unsavoury characters. It was a cornerstone of those early brainstorming meetings that *Little Big Adventure*, as it would eventually be called, would be a game as diverse in terms of gameplay as it would be geographically. An adventure that combined characters, dialogue, story, puzzles and combat like never before.



The world of Twinsun: quiet, peaceful, serene.



The resistance begins its armed assault against Funfrock.

"We wanted to create a world where love and peace would be eternal, and social harmony reigned supreme"

DIDIER CHANFRAY ART DIRECTOR, *LITTLE BIG ADVENTURE*

"We kept our anti-*Doom* vision and wanted a richer style of gameplay with the main weapon," says Raynal. "There were several ways of using the magic ball with the four behaviour modes (Normal, Athletic, Aggressive and Discreet), and bounces that would relate to each one."

A WOMAN'S TOUCH

Stylistically, *LBA* worked perfectly as a direct result of the techniques employed in bringing the world of Twinsun (named after its twin suns) to life. Rounded, Gouraud-shaded polygons appeared very simple and cartoon-like and could be animated relatively easily, while keeping in-step with the cutesy-yet-dark mentality of the game. Seemingly so as not to appear too lifelike, Twinsen's movements were over-emphasised, comic, yet recognisably human and frail. "We obviously tried to imagine a fantasy world with deep references to our real world," says Raynal. "It's easier then for players to emphasise with the character they're controlling."

"For this project, the artistic direction was completely related to the techniques used," adds Chanfray. "For reasons of speed, the palette of 256 colours was organised in groups of 16 colours. This organisation allowed me to create perfectly round objects with very few polygons. After this, the design of the characters followed naturally. The 16 main colours set the tone of the game and were chosen by Yaël (Barroz): only a female vision could create the feel we wanted."

For all the bright colours and Toyland creatures, however, Adeline wanted all along to present a darker side, preferably without having to resort to violent scenes of death and destruction. Indeed, *ZONE* readily recalls that even in the earliest levels of *LBA*, there's an undoubted malevolence in Toytown (Twinsen starts his journey being beaten up in an Asylum), and every time a Funfrockite guard slapped an emergency alarm and a cloned elephant teleported in and bore down on you, it was genuinely unnerving.



***LBA*'s cut-scenes were breathtaking in their day.**



FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

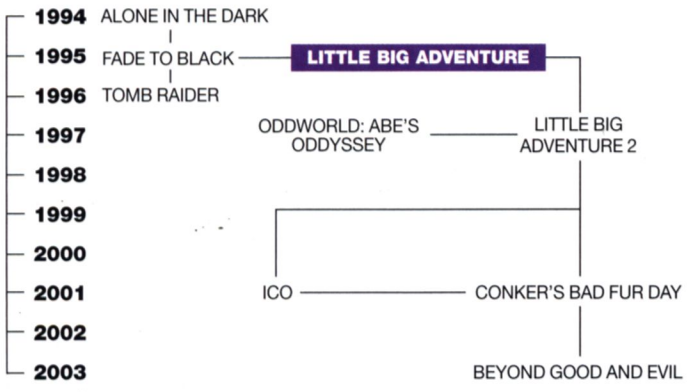
"The framework of the scenario of *Little Big Adventure* is very conventional in its duality," admits Chanfray. "It's the eternal battle between good and evil. In a world where the animals speak (a real world of fantasy), you have to dramatise the evil in a realistic way so you actually feel like it exists. Because of this, the evil Funfrock has all of the attributes of an Earthly dictator – he is willing to sacrifice his own people to get what he wants, he speaks frequently and manipulatively, and he has a personality cult with propaganda littering the streets."

Significantly, whilst work on *AITD* is remembered with anxiety, Raynal recalls *LBA*'s development with great fondness, recalling very few instances where the grind of development overshadowed creative desire.

"It was ten years ago; I now have the feeling that everything was almost perfect. We did have very good relationships in the team and (almost) each day was a pleasure," he says, before absent-mindedly recalling an instance when it seemed all the work that had been done was lost due to a hard disk crash with the server. Despite being independent from Infogrames, however, Raynal does have a few regrets with how *LBA* turned out. From the beginning it was envisaged that outdoor areas would be rendered in full 3D. Sadly, there was no time to develop the necessary tools, although it was a feature that would dominate the sequel.

FAMILY TREE

As family trees go, *LBA*'s bloodline highlights just how far the adventure genre has plummeted. That's not a slur on the quality of the game, more that because of a perceived belief that gamers desire linear, short and violent games, the market for large, colourful charming adventures is estimated to be worth zilch.





The opening Asylum break-out is remembered with fear and fondness by many.



Twinsen would often see stars both literally and figuratively.

"If I could, I would go back and change the save game feature," admits Raynal. "*LBA* was originally for the PC but there were also plans to create a version for Super Nintendo, so we tried to have the same system for both. It was still useful for the PlayStation version, but it didn't work out so well on PC."

But the biggest gripe players had was that when controlling Twinsen indoors, in Athletic (run) mode he would bound off the walls in a fit of temporary disorientation. "It was to simulate the fact that you don't run in small areas like houses, you walk," says Raynal with a smile. "OK, bad idea."

LITTLE BIG RELEASE

Named *Relentless* in the US (*Little Big Adventure* was deemed to be too fey a title by the suits at EA, who wanted a tougher name that would appeal to the *Doom* generation), *LBA* was released in December 1994, earning itself a *PC ZONE* Classic award and shifting half a million copies. A PlayStation version followed, as did a sequel, *LBA2: Twinsen's Odyssey* in 1997, a game that would see our hero memorably visiting a low-gravity moon, interact with a hideous dustbin-occupying alien race known as the Esmers, and drive a little car around a desert – and of course, finally fulfill Raynal's vision for a full 3D camera.

"We had to reinforce the contrast between indoors and outdoors sceneries, as I really wanted a 3D view for external backgrounds since the beginning," remembers Raynal. "I really appreciated the work of Serge Plagnol and Cedric Bermond, who were low-level engineers and did very efficient graphic code and Windows 95 implementation. But my favourite time in *LBA2*'s development were the brainstorming meetings when we created the basis of the story and the planet of Zeelich." Ah, the hive-like home of the Mosquibees, the mining Wannies of the Undergas and the Gazogem-producing Francos – who looked more than a little bit like sausages, and were invariably on the receiving end of one of Twinsen's trademarked 'seeing stars' biffs to the face.

Despite selling a healthy 300,000 copies, *LBA2* and its quest to unmask the evil Black Monk (who turned out to be Funfrock in disguise) marked a premature end to the Twinsen story. Work on a third episode had began, but a deal was brokered that would see Adeline become part of the Sega empire. The team was renamed No Cliché, and work on a secret Dreamcast project commenced. In 1999, in time for the US launch of Sega's last console, *Toy Commander* was released, a good game, but neither big, nor little, nor in any sense of the word an adventure.

Today Raynal is working on a few projects as an external consultant and promising to "jump on some real stuff in a few months." Perhaps then it's not too late to hope for a third game that might conclude the adventures of everyone's favourite Quetch?

"There is nothing that really prevents *LBA3* from seeing the light of day," says Raynal hopefully. "Didier and I speak a lot about it these days."

"*LBA3* is ready," says Chanfray, before dropping us down to Earth, "only so far, it's only in the head of Fred and myself. Unfortunately, putting a title into production today is difficult. There isn't any real publisher desire for this type of product. The big name publishers are happy to manage their biggest-selling titles and that's it... That's all there is to say!"

He may be optimistic about fathering a new *Little Big Adventure*, but Frederick Raynal is unconvinced that the original was anything more than just a good game. We insist his work continues to be an inspiration, citing the recent *Beyond Good & Evil* as proof, but Raynal just shrugs. "*LBA* was the logical convergence and evolution of several inspirational games. It's just another brick in the wall." A very large brick, we quietly add. PZ

THE FUTURE

KEEP THE FAITH

A couple of years ago *Little Big Adventure* was being groomed as a potential Game Boy Advance release. Sadly it was not to be. Then we heard of a project Frederick Raynal was working on called *Trium Planeta*, an adventure that apparently was close to completion until disagreements threw the game into the same part of development hell in which *LBA3* has resided for the last eight years. In short, it's looking pretty grim, not only for fans of *LBA* but for adventure fans in general.

But a quick squint over a few independent studio websites reveals that a few teams still dream of a return to the golden days of adventuring, although in general the feel of the games is far removed from that which characterised the carefree adventures of LucasArts, Delphine and Adeline. *Dreamfall*, *Fahrenheit* and *Indigo Prophecy* are promising-looking games, but for a touch of humour we've got an eye on *Al Emmo And The Lost Dutchman's Mine*, *Juniper Crescent* (by ex-Revolution Steve Ince) and *Bone*, a point-and-clicker by members of the team that worked on the aborted *Sam & Max* sequel.



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*Contents subject to change. Issue 156's Next Month page accuracy: 81.81%. A dip in performance, but still earns us a shiny silver star

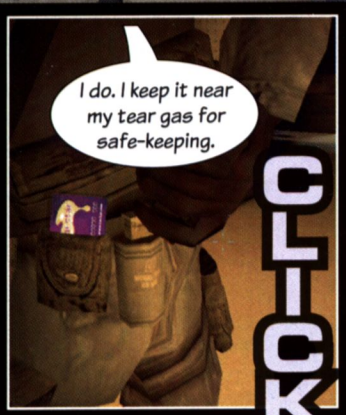
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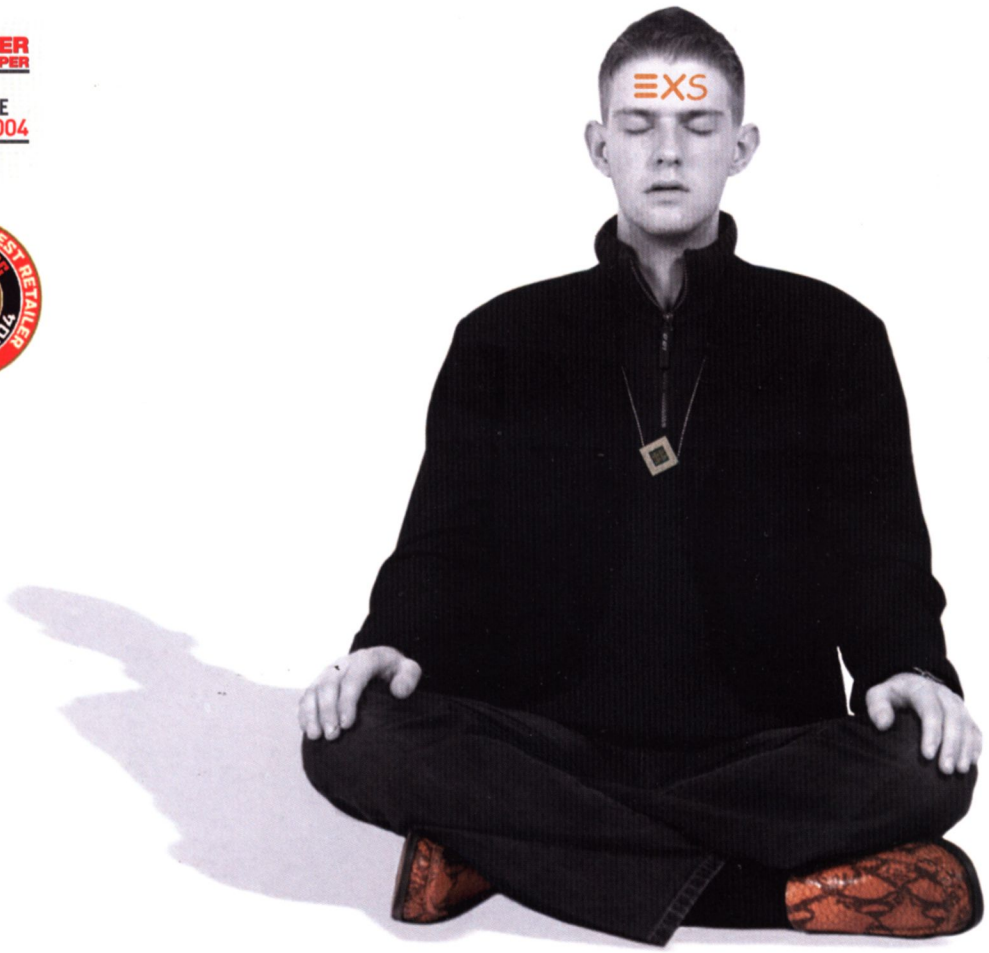
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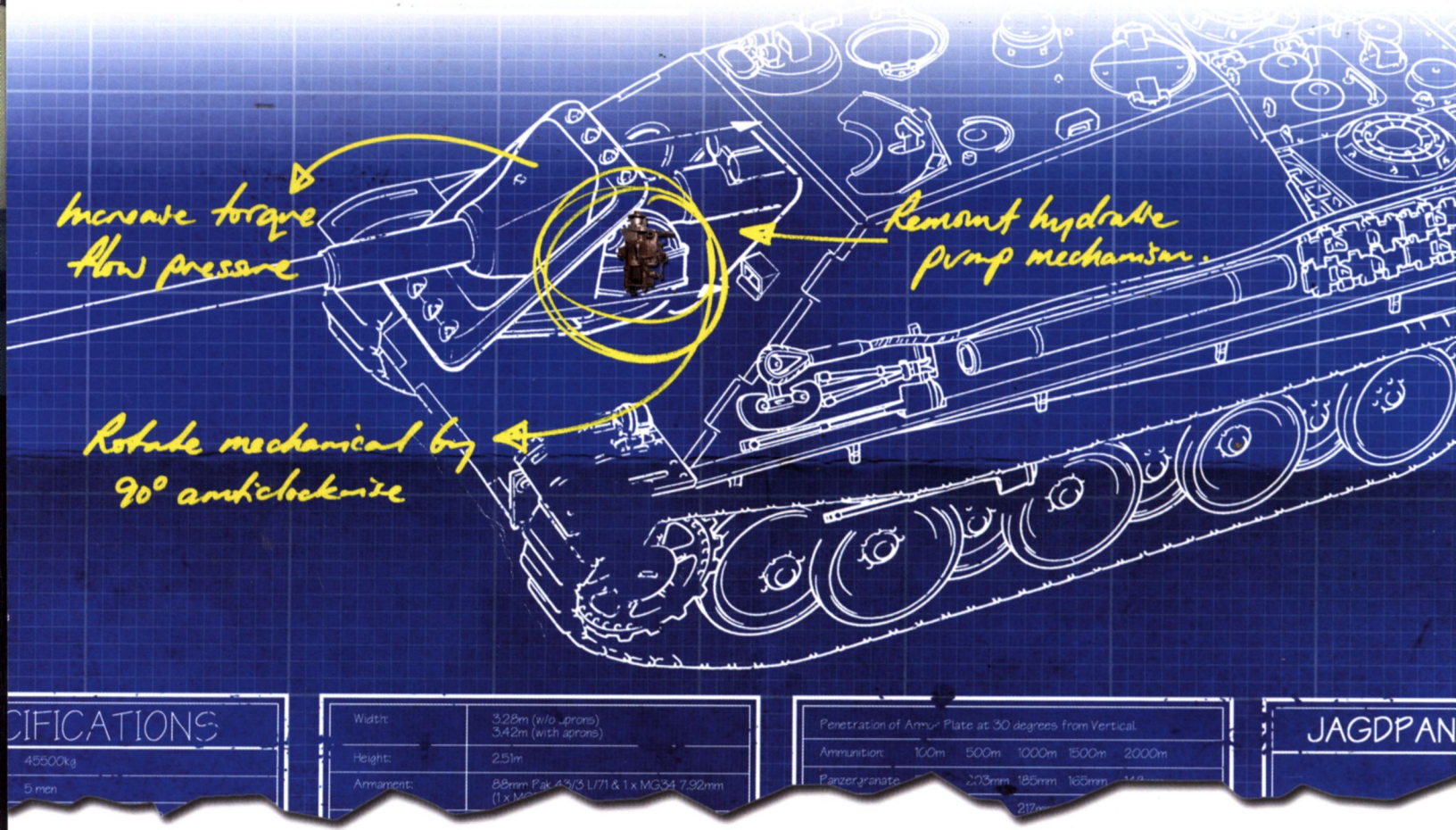
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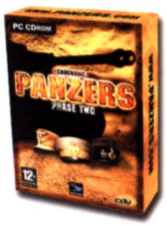


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